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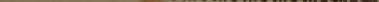
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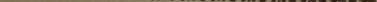








# THIS OLD MAN











MOTHERHOOD.

From a drypoint by Muirhead Bone.



# THIS OLD MAN

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ BY ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

GERTRUDE BONE

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY  
MUIRHEAD BONE

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
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# THIS OLD MAN

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## *Chapter One*

**J**OHAN DUTTON OPENED THE BACK-door of his cottage and went out into the darkness of the early morning to get kindling for the kitchen fire. Mary, his wife, was upstairs with face-ache. Outside was very dark and still. The night seemed to stretch on infinitely into a wide silence. John's movements in the shed were all audible as he rummaged for the brushwood. The candle he had left alight on the scullery table burned quite steadily even with the back-door open. He paused for a moment as he came out of the shed. The silence impressed him. A cold wind surrounded him suddenly and streamed on into the silence.

"Snow's coming, I think," he said to himself, and going back into the kitchen rammed his handful of kindling on top of the paper already laid in the grate. He lit the fire, filled the kettle and set it on.

"I'd better get some more in before it comes over thick," he said, going out again. This time he brought in an armful and, opening the oven door with his foot, pushed it in far to the back. He slammed the door, went to the scullery and

shut the back-door, bringing with him the candle he had left on the scullery table. His shadow seemed to bring the night into the room behind him, following the light and covering up the ceiling. The fire crackled a good deal before it caught. John pulled some harness from a hook behind the door and, taking a leather from the table drawer, began to polish the brass of the harness.

He was a man of about sixty-five, with a small grey beard and hooked nose. After having followed all the occupations available in the country outside farming, he was now employed as a carrier and remover. His savings were supposed to be substantial by the country people, who regarded him, nevertheless, as "funny". Mary, his wife, they considered "one of the best".

Laying the polished harness carefully on the table, he drew out several packages and parcels from beneath the sofa and put them on top instead. At the sight of a basket of Keswick apples he paused in his work and went to a door at one corner of the room. As he opened it a stair was visible with a strip of brown oilcloth nailed to it. The old man spoke aloud from the foot to some invisible person upstairs.

"Mary."

"What?" asked a woman's voice.

"What's the name of that house that used to be Wilson's farm? Hillside, ain't it? I've knowed it ever since Mrs. Wilson lived there, and ever since

I was a boy I've never heard it called anything but Hillside. Hillside it was in *her* day, and *I've* always called it that."

"Well, who says different?" asked the voice from upstairs. It was a voice with an opinion. The old man's voice was tentative in its tone and a little aggrieved as he replied :

"Well, now, look here ! Last night Mr. Plunkett, he says to me, 'John,' he said, 'leave this gallon of apples at Hillside as you go home,' he said. So I took the gallon of apples and I went to Hillside where old Mrs. Wilson used to live. Gentleman living there says, 'This ain't for me. I never ordered no apples !' 'I was told to bring them to Hillside,' I said, 'and I done it.' 'But this *ain't* Hillside,' he said ; 'where Mr. Green lives—*that's* Hillside.' 'I've always called this place Hillside,' I said ; 'ever since I was a boy I've known it called that. Why, I knowed old Mrs. Wilson when *she* lived here. I helped to kill a pig under that apple-tree there.' 'I can't help Mrs. Wilson and I can't help the pig,' he said, 'and I can't help the name you've always called my house, but I ain't ordered no apples and you must take 'em away,' he said. 'No,' I said. 'I was told to leave those apples at Hillside and I've left 'em.' 'You'd better take 'em to Mr. Green's,' he said. 'No, I shan't,' I said. 'I'll leave 'em where I was told to and that's here. You can't tell me nothing about this country. Why, I was born here.'"

He went back to the basket of apples that had



reminded him of Hillside and raised them beside the other packages.

"Did you leave them?" asked the voice from upstairs.

"Yes! I came away without them," said John, searching in his pockets. He found a piece of string and tied the lid of the basket on tightly.

"People don't always say what they thinks," he soliloquized as he cut the end of the string with his knife. "I'd better be certain nothing can't tumble out."

He walked to the foot of the stairs again.

"Do you know that man close against the sign-post at Neston? Nasty snapping little dog he's got. Very nearly had me yesterday. Got hold of my trouser. I kicks out and the man comes running. 'If you hurt that dog,' he says, 'I'll hit you!'—not, 'If that dog hurts *you* I'll hit him.' Oh no! 'If you hurt that dog I'll hit *you*.' That's what he said and that's what he meant, too."

The lid of the kettle began to clatter. He turned to the fire-place and lifted it, then called upstairs again:

"Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Please," said the woman's voice.

He took the brown earthenware teapot from the cupboard, shook the tea into the hollow of his hand from a tin canister and made the tea.

"Is it ready?" asked the woman, wearily.

"Wet and warm. That's all it is yet," replied John.

"My face is bad," said the woman.

"Shall I make a poultice?" asked John suddenly.

"Oh, I wish you would! Oh, dear me! I could cry, it hurts me so bad."

"Where shall I find an old stocking?" called John, pulling open the top drawer of a chest at the back of the sofa.

"Top drawer," began his wife.

"Sort of grey one with a rib and the top torn off," asked John, passing it through his hands and describing it as he did so.

"That'll do. You know where there's some bran," said the woman.

"Will you have some mustard in it?" asked John.

"As hot as you can make it. Oh, dear me!" groaned the woman.

John's deliberate movements became a little quicker.

"I shan't be long," he shouted.

He reached basin and bran and mustard and measured the dry materials. Then he rolled the stocking open. He poured the boiling water on to the bran and mixed it with an iron spoon. He filled the stocking foot with the mixture and, rolling the leg round it in a bundle, carried it to the foot of the stairs. There he paused.

"What shall I do about your cup of tea? You can't drink it with your face all tied up, can ye?" he demurred.

“ Give me the poultice first,” moaned his wife.

John went upstairs.

“ Here it is,” he said. “ Shall I tie it on for you ? ”

The woman sat up in bed. She opened her striped flannelette nightgown to prevent the collar getting wet. Her cheek was swollen badly.

“ Give it me,” she said. “ Just hold the end ! Now put it round. Oh, how it plunges ! ”

The tears induced by the pain and sudden heat started to her eyes and rolled down her swollen cheek. John became suddenly agitated.

“ I’ll get you the tea,” he said, going to the stair.

He carried it upstairs, stirring it on the way so that she might have it at once. She gulped several mouthfuls while he held the saucer.

“ Do you feel better ? ” he asked.

“ A bit,” she replied. “ You go on downstairs again now and get on with the pony. I’ll be all right for a bit now.”

“ It’s going to snow, I think,” said John. “ I shan’t do no more’n I needs to to-day. I don’t know what we’re going to do if his corn goes up higher than it is. I told him yesterday when I gave it him that he must look at it first and think about it, but he won’t, you know.”

“ He can’t do his work and go without it. He must have it : to do his work he must,” said his wife in a stifled voice.

“ Yes, I know,” said John. “ He’s wonderful spiteful, though—wonderful spiteful ! And a poor

starved little tit he was when first I got him. You wouldn't know him now, would you? But he eats!"

"He has to, to do his work," repeated the woman.

"Oh yes, and he does it, too," said John.

He went downstairs. The daylight was now in the room, a grey light which dulled the candle flame. John blew out the candle and poured a cup of tea for himself. He drank it with a sucking noise, then swilled out his cup in a basin of water and went outside again. The pony heard his footsteps and began to paw the floor of his stable.

"Quiet now! You be still there! Whoa!" said the old man as he opened the door of the stable. The warm air met the cold as he entered. The pony turned his head, pulling at his rope.

"Hold up that noddle, now! Back!" said John, pulling hard as the pony strained towards him, his teeth showing. "Got your snowshoes on?" asked the old man, patting and smoothing his neck. "You'll want 'em. It's going to snow. Eh? how'll you do with that! Come on, then! Now don't you bite *me*! You can't do without me, you know. Who's going to give you your corn if you bites me? *I* shan't. No! that *I* shan't. You must think about that, you know. You'll want that corn presently and then *I* shan't be here. I'll be tying up my arm where you can't see me and *I* shan't come no more. *I* ain't fond of being bitten. Now you just hitch up."

The pony's rubbing down being finished, John's talk came to an end also. He pulled down hay from the rack above and filled the manger. The pony began to breathe and sniff the hay before dragging it up with his teeth and champing it. The pig-sty was just outside the stable-door, and as he passed it, John emptied a bucket of sour-smelling liquid into the pigs' trough. A yearling hog came grunting out.

"You ain't in a hurry, are ye?" said John. "I can't stop to 'tend to *you*. I've got to get on and out and missis in bed with face-ache. Where's *your* missis? Be wanting one before long, won't you? Keep you in order she will and you wants it."

He took the empty pail to the yard pump, swilled it out and put the bucket upside down on the flags. He went indoors. His wife was dressed and bending over the kitchen fire.

"You haven't got up out of bed, have you?" asked John, standing still at the door.

"You can't go without your breakfast," said his wife.

"It won't be the first time I've got my own breakfast," said John. "You didn't need to come down for that."

"The day stretches so long if you stays in bed," said Mary. "It's better to get up and get something to do."

She laid a cloth on the table and set on it a cup and saucer and plate of glazed earthenware. A

rasher was frying on the stove and as John put the eggs from his pocket on the table the woman broke two into the frying-pan.

"Sit down and get your breakfast," said she.

"Ain't *you* going to have none?" he asked, sitting down.

She shook her head and sat down by the fire, holding her head in her hand. John ate his breakfast in the same deliberate manner with which he did everything and, rising, began to collect the plates together again.

"Leave 'em a-be," said his wife, turning her face slightly. "I'll clear away when I feels like it. You get you gone now or you'll never be round to-day."

"You sit still by the fire," said John, turning with his hands full of the plates. "'Tain't no use getting your face-ache worse, is it?"

"Well, I suppose it isn't," acquiesced the woman.

"It's going to snow, I think," said John, going out from the scullery to the stable again.

His wife began to sway backwards and forwards, humming a tune as if to put to sleep a wakeful child. The heat of the fire and the rocking made her sleepy, and when John returned she had actually fallen asleep with her head on the arm of the chair. He stood looking at her for a moment, moved the kettle to the other side of the fire—"might boil over on her," he said to himself)—and, with elaborate precautions for silence, began to carry out his packages to the yard-gate where

the white pony, harnessed now to the cart, was waiting.

"Do her good to let her sleep a bit," the old man said to the pony. "Swelling up might ease the pain in her face. I'll get my coat and hat. Whoa, now ! You can't go without me. Don't you think about it now. I won't be a minute."

At that moment the sun appeared, breaking through the dark indigo expanses of the sky. Widening the rift as if slowly extricating itself, the pale winter disk looked as ruddy a gold as that of an autumn sun against the iron-toned lift. Then, down each slope of a bank of cloud, as though resting upon it, two wide and splendid wings of light were unspread and folded all the heavens from one burning heart of glory. John looked at the sky with scrutiny, his face lit by the flaming light.

"Snow's coming all right," he said. "Gee up now !"

Hearing his master's voice, the pony reluctantly awoke and took several uncertain steps, then finding that he really meant it, began to move forward from the yard to the lane.

"*He* knows best how fast he can go and keep on going, don't he?" John was accustomed to say of his pony, and the pony chose a pace as deliberate as his master's.

John settled himself among his parcels, and then, from his high seat in the cart, began to take possession of the affairs of his neighbours, as he



saw them over the hedge ; stowing one thing after another in his mind much as he arranged his parcels in the cart, and postponing comment upon them until he brought them out again in the evening for Mary's discussion and judgement.

## Chapter Two

“ANY WORD!” SAID JOHN, AS A  
M noiseless, chilling mass covered his feet  
when he opened the door next morning.  
“It *has* come down.”

He took the yard-brush from the scullery and, sweeping the snow from the door-step, swept also a path to the stable and hen-house. There was a dim light reflected from the snow and a full moon seemed to be looking through the mist to see that everything was right before it vanished. The air was not cold. All the cold had been gathered on the ground. Within the stable it was steaming and hot. John came in, kicking the snow from his boots, and lit the kitchen fire. Mary came downstairs, turning to latch the door and setting down her candlestick.

“I was going to take them flower-pots over the hill to-day,” said John, “but I shan’t get it done, nor they wouldn’t want ’em this weather. I shall have to take the pony to the blacksmith’s as soon as it’s daylight. It ain’t cold but it’s thick.”

He went out again to attend to the animals and to brush the snow from the roof of the stable, which was leaking. He pulled on his coat and took his hat.

“I don’t know what time he’ll come in this morning, but I’ll get along early. There’ll be

horses coming in all right this morning. Plenty of 'em."

The world was changed. No vestige of it appeared as it had done the morning before. It might have been another planet. No one had even trodden the lane before John and the pony. They were the first to see that new and entrancing landscape. The pony snuffed at the snow and snorted at the cold contact. John stamped his feet at intervals to rid his boots of the ball of snow which collected on his heels. White fields with heavy blue shadows stretched on to an iron horizon. Muffled trees stood helpless under the weight of their clinging accumulation of snowflakes. The muted lanes sent a strange light upwards under the eyelids. The few birds shivering together on the top of the barn looked sooty and draggled. The blacksmith's forge was at the cross-roads and the glow inside made the rest of the shed dark and sent a thick shadow into the corners. Two cart-horses were standing at the door, and a hospitable ringing of steel upon iron came out with a friendly sound into the shrouded and silent world. The waggoners in charge of the horses turned as John came near, the padding sound of the pony's hoofs audible through the opaque and murky air. One of them was telling how his wife had been overtaken in the snowstorm and, in attempting to cross the field in the dark, had been unable to find her way out again.

"Seemed as though the stile had got lost—she

said. Round and round she went, and Lizzie she began to cry and then she fell in a snowdrift herself and *she* was nearly crying, too. And the funny thing was they'd got to the stile once and then gone all the way back again. I found their footmarks this morning. But *she* couldn't find her way out, though, and then pop she went into some trees that was noted to her and she got out through the hedge. She was fair crying when she got home."

"It's a comical thing that stile at the best of times : a wonderful hiding thing it is : if it wasn't for seeing the path to it you'd hardly know it was there," said the other waggoner.

The stamping of the horse as it moved its foot from the blacksmith's grasp and the blowing of the forge came from the smithy. The dark-faced man whose horse, tied to a staple in the smithy, was being shod, went hastily indoors and took its head. The shoe was too wide. The smith tossed it on to the forge again. A roar and glow greeted the movement of his hand on the lever. He pulled out the shoe with the tongs and hammered it into shape, then pulled up the horse's foot and, resting it between his knees, began to hammer on the shoe.

"It's worse than coming home on a Saturday night," said the dark-faced man. "Coming down the hill I was from the 'Wheatsheaf' last night and that ploughman from Newton's was coming down, too, rolling drunk he was, and he was looking for his wife. I expect she was at home all

right looking for *him*, but he'd got it into his head that she'd gone down to Saturday market. It was Tuesday yesterday, wasn't it, or was it Wednesday?—but he thought it was Saturday because he was drunk, I suppose, and you never heard such a carry-on as he kept up. Slipping about all the time in the snow he was. 'You never know, do you!'—this is how he went on. 'I wish I could find her. You never know, do you—such dreadful things you read of in the papers. I wish I could find her. You haven't seen her, have you? You never know, do you?'—and all about the things you read of in papers. And then a motor came along and he very nearly pitched into the light. Would a done if I hadn't been there. I don't know where he got to in the end. I turned off at the farrier's lane."

" 'Plough and Horses', I expect," said the blacksmith, letting the horse's foot drop. "That's where most of 'em gets to."

"Did you hear about old George?" asked the dark-faced man who seemed to be talkative. "Spent yesterday bishopping his old biddy. Painted her gills beautiful and got her ready in her cage and all and an egg beside her in the straw—why, last egg she laid was on old George's twenty-first birthday—and here comes the snow and he can't get her to market. He ain't half in a way about it. 'She'll live another week,' I says to him. 'She've been summered and wintered many a year. She'll not die now.'"

The man unhooked the rope and, wrapping it round his arm, pulled the horse's head towards the door. One of the other horses waiting took its place as the man, stopping a minute to light his pipe, shuffled off in the snowy road, his horse keeping at a rope's distance behind him.

While the men were laughing and the blacksmith straightened himself, a two-wheeled yellow trap drew up in the road. The driver—a fresh-faced and good-looking young farmer, sprucely dressed and with a white tie and flower in his buttonhole, was evidently full of some news he had to communicate. Before he could do so the blacksmith said :

“ Well, Alfred, and how's the snow up the hill this morning ? ”

“ Bad ! Bad,” said the young man. “ It's nothing down here to what it is up there. Thought I should never get out and past, and I've got to be at Overton at half-past nine. My sister's getting married. You've not been up there this morning, I suppose ? ”

The men shook their heads.

“ There's a great to-do up in the farrier's lane,” went on the farmer in an excited tone. “ Queerest thing ever I heard of happening in a snow-storm. My word, it's thick up there ! One place it's blown up to the hedge. Dr. Little, he got stuck in his car once coming along last night. But you know where that blind man lives that keeps a shop, behind the farrier's lane up against the hop kilns ? ”

"Him that's got a brother married to Joseph Nore's daughter," explained the blacksmith to the others.

"Well, it's him that they're all in a mess about," continued the farmer. "Frightened out of her life she's been these two days, has Joe Nore's daughter. He'd gone off his head or something, and last night she made some potato-cakes and took 'em upstairs to him. Stared at her enough to terrify her, he did. 'You go downstairs,' he said, 'and never let me see you come up here again.' Terrified she was, and then, seemingly, it began to come over thick and she couldn't go and fetch nobody. She was going over to the kitchen table to light the lamp—table stands in the window—and she saw his bare legs hanging out of the bedroom window. Never had no time to call out or nothing. Off he was up the garden and out in the snow. Nothing on but his shirt and pants he hadn't. Five minutes after in come his blind brother. Must have passed him in the lane, but of course he couldn't see nothing and didn't know it was him in his pants and shirt. This morning they finds him dead three miles off. Shepherd come in from over the hill and finds him. Passed his own blind brother in the road, too."

The young man paused to regard the situation, then gave rein to his horse, which had been pawing the ground for some minutes.

"Couldn't see him, and him going off to die," said John Dutton solemnly.



"That's an oddity, him going to die and passing his own blind brother in the road," said the waggoner.

"I don't recollect anything like that happening before, not in the whole of my knowledge," said John. "Hello!" he ejaculated suddenly as the pony began to kick and pull at the bridle. "You have to wait your turn like other people."

"Just finished," said the blacksmith.

As the waggoner led his horse out into the snow again, the pony stretched his neck towards him, his teeth bared.

"You keep your enquiries to yourself," said the man, pushing its head away.

"Wonderful spiteful he is," said John of the pony, "but a good servant. You wouldn't believe what a poor little tit he was when I first got him. I says to Mary, 'Well, he'll last for three months,' and now I've had him seven years. Starved he was. But he's funny! 'Tain't everybody could do with him."

"No!" assented the smith. "He's funny all right."

"Good morning," said a man's voice at the door. "I want two clamps made by to-morrow afternoon. Do you think you can manage to do it? I've got the drawing of them. It's quite simple. It's just going ahead with them."

John and the blacksmith both turned round. A young man stood in the doorway against the light. His vigorous upright body was dressed in a light

corduroy suit. He had a soft-brimmed black hat on his head and wore a shabby blue silk band round his neck which tied in a bow with wide ends under his chin. His whole head, such as could be seen beneath the hat, was of great beauty. The expression of the face was ardent and determined—possibly fanatical. He wasted no time in speech, but handed a piece of drawing-paper to the blacksmith. The man glanced at the drawing.

“ I think I can do it, sir,” he said.

“ All right. I’ll call for them to-morrow night,” said the young man, vacating the door suddenly.

“ He’s a fine-looking young fellow,” said John.

“ Getting on very well, too,” said the blacksmith.

“ I was reading about him in the papers a little while ago. They was speaking very well about him, too.”

“ I ain’t seen nothing he’s done,” said John, “ but I hears talk about it. Carving, ain’t it ? ”

“ As far as I knows,” said the smith. “ I ain’t seen none of it either.”

“ Going to have an increase soon, ain’t they, them two ? ” asked John.

“ Dunno ! ” said the blacksmith. “ I ain’t never seen her. Seems of a shy make.”

John was suddenly seized with a wish to talk to Mary.

### *Chapter Three*

THE SNOW DISAPPEARED AS QUICK-  
T ly as it had come. For a few days the open country remained with the chill of snow upon it, and the sky, dun-coloured, sad and gloomy, appeared more solid than the insubstantial surface of the fields. Grass-tufts made their appearance. The outline of the roads, the ridges of furrows, the black winter hedgerows seemed to rise as if from a submergence and to shake off an annoyance. The earth was crumbly and soft to walk upon, collecting on the shoes in a sticky mass. With the inconvenience of the snow lifted, work went on in the fields as before. John Dutton, passing the farther end of the village with his pony, met two ladies walking slowly. The younger of the two he knew as the wife of the handsome wood-carver who had come into the blacksmith's the day of the snow-storm. The elder was, he supposed, a friend. He saw them open the gate of a whitewashed cottage and, skirting the house, make their way to the thatched barn at the back which served for the young husband's studio. He often took cases to and from the station for the young man and was familiar with his gentle little wife. The elder lady he had never seen before, and he put her down in the chronicle of his mind as "a stranger".

Both ladies went into the studio and shut the door.

"Stopping with them I suppose she is," said John to himself as he drove slowly past the cottage.

Helen Ross, "the stranger", was certainly "stopping" with the wood-carver and his wife, whose acquaintance she had made in this way. Her brother, childless and a widower and a fine connoisseur of the arts, had, after the death of his wife, become an active patron of young and promising artists. Helen, his hostess and also his companion, her fine and liberal sympathies engaged in renewing the interests of her brother, the depth of whose sorrow at his wife's death she alone knew, gave herself to the study of the strange beings (for so she, educated, trained, self-controlled and critical, thought her brother's protegees)—beings at the same moment capable of such meanness and such exaltation, such childish vanities and such deep and purging sorrows.

On the death of her brother she found herself mistress of a fund for the encouragement of art, a portion of which was for the payment of fees for any young craftsman whose ability satisfied the judgement of a certain art professor. This man, whom Helen consulted whenever the money was free, was so confident about young David Niven that her interest was aroused in the boy himself. He, equally certain about his own possibilities, saw nothing out of the way in this interest. He *was* interesting. If Helen saw that, all the better.

She would have the satisfaction of knowing that her brother's money was being properly spent for once. His penetration suspected reserves of judgement on the part of his patroness, but then he made allowance in that she wasn't an artist and therefore couldn't know. She couldn't help that, of course. He was gratified secretly that he could keep the interest of so clever and accomplished a woman. If he had been a painter he would have painted her. She couldn't ask more.

He had justified his professor's judgement and was getting more and more work into his hands. His personal beauty, of which he was careless, was enough to interest any woman, but Helen had been uneasy and concerned when she heard of his marriage.

"Why shouldn't I marry?" David had asked, discerning her doubt at once.

Helen found that she could give no reason which appeared to be reasonable.

"Well—I'm going to," he said finally.

"Why?" asked Helen, smiling. "Do you think you'll make a good husband?"

"I want Elizabeth," said David baldly.

"Oh, that's why," said Helen. "I might have thought of that, mightn't I? Well! You'll let *me* know Elizabeth, too, won't you?" And she had come to know her.

"David!" she had said later to him. "Have you any idea really what sort of a person Elizabeth is?"

“Of course I know what Elizabeth’s like,” said David testily. “Don’t you put ideas into her head.”

“I shouldn’t dream of doing so. It’s the ideas she’s got in of her own I was wondering about,” said Helen.

## Chapter Four

DAVID DID NOT SO MUCH DIS-  
trust Helen's ideas as find no use for them.  
From many such conversations as the  
following Helen had retreated, baffled.

"It's another way of getting at things, I suppose," she was accustomed to say tolerantly. Sitting in his studio one summer day, dressed with her usual discriminating taste—David admired her taste—her dress of heavy ivory-coloured woollen material with an amber trimming which repeated the beautiful glow of her hair, her face intelligent, cultivated, sympathetic, she reminded David of an alabaster lamp with a vivid golden flame shining through. He was very quiet as she talked.

"If you'll keep still, Helen," he had said suddenly, "I can finish it, I think."

"Finish what?" demanded Helen, turning towards him.

"I had to do a panel for a woman's nunnery or some such place, and I'll do you—St. Catherine of Siena talking to the theologians," said David.

"Do you mean to say," asked Helen in a slightly nettled tone, "that while I've been talking to you for your good you've just been drawing *me*?"

"Yes," said David. "I think with this drawing and another sitting I shall be able to do the panel all right."



"Have you heard *anything* I said?" asked Helen.

"Yes, of course. I heard it all," answered David, still studying his model.

"About passion and love and discipline?" asked Helen.

"Yes, I heard. Fine things, of course, but I can't draw 'em. I can't draw ideas, so I go on doing my own job. I draw what the ideas have produced, and that's you—a beautiful virgin."

"Really, David!" said Helen.

David smiled and repeated. "*I* comment. That's my job."

"Yes!" replied Helen dubiously. "But you'd reckon yourself more than a mirror, you know. You *do* deal in ideas, after all."

"Look here," said David. "You've been talking a long time."

"I'm sorry," murmured Helen.

"No, you've given me a chance of a good figure-drawing," said David; "but now tell me: while you were talking about these great ideas of yours, were you really thinking of *me*—honest injun now!"

Helen reflected. "I was thinking as hard as I could of making my ideas presentable to you," she said.

"There you are!" exclaimed David. "That's *your* work of art. You've brought to it all the things you've been talking about—observation, receptiveness, discipline, knowledge,—and then you try to present me with it all. That's *your* work of art, and here's mine for *you*. The figure of a woman,

intellectual, noble, and impassioned to a fine purpose ; St. Catherine, in fact ! I deal with ideas when they've assumed a form. There's the dilemma you've got to."

"No, it's not so simple as that," said Helen. "You *do* deal in ideas. You, too, rearrange infinitely the forms you see until you do in the end carve an idea, something which is not there until you *present* it with its form. If it lacks a quality, you borrow one without scruple from elsewhere to complete your idea. You compose. You arrange. In fact, you deal in ideas."

"Well, all right !" said David, looking at his drawing, then at Helen again. "This is going to be a jolly good thing. Six foot by three they said they wanted."

"The thing that's going to escape you, nevertheless, David dear,—may I be permitted to change my position ?" asked Helen.

"All right. I've done with you," said David. "I shall want another sitting, though, for the drapery."

"The thing which you're going to allow to escape you," continued Helen, "is a certain faculty of growth you don't allow for. Your materials are changing as you work."

"So am I, too, for the matter of that," said David. "The point is to nail the thing you want and keep it crucified till you've got it. You must keep your own hand on the moment, too."

"And suppose it's alive and gets hurt ?" asked Helen.

“What does it matter if you give it another life? It ought to be glad to be used.”

“I see,” said Helen.

It was this conversation which had emerged from her memory when she heard of David's marriage.

He had come to live in the country now because, as he said, it was cheap, and because you got so much for nothing in the country just by opening your eyes. It was *the* place for poor people, and Elizabeth liked it, too. It was good for her in her present condition.

## Chapter Five

HELEN RECALLED WITH AMUSEMENT the visit of a scientific man to David's studio. He had come with genuine interest in the carver's work. He had a boy who wished to be an artist and he was going into the matter thoroughly.

"One wishes to be informed as to the best methods," he had explained aside to Helen, "and then, also, if I saw anything I liked of Mr. Niven's work I might buy it. Though I ought to warn you that I'm a little old-fashioned. No doubt, of course, modern art has its developments."

David's eyes missed nothing of absurdity, and Helen thought she might be needed. The scientist might, in spite of his pompous ways, be really interested and buy something. He had come correctly dressed for the country. From the first it was no use. He was facetious. David was serious.

"Why did you make their faces so ugly? There is beauty in the human face, is there not?" he asked genially as to a very young person.

David looked at him gravely. "To the artist there is nothing ugly but stupidity," he answered.

"I like the border better than the panel," said the visitor.

"You would," said David.

The scientist was nettled, turned a little red and

began to put David in his place. He would let this very young unmannerly person see a little of the trained mind. He talked of beauty, the possibly mistaken ideas on beauty : the common notion that the world of nature is more beautiful than it need be because of the benefactions of some wondrous lover who delights in it. Yet how do we know that the flowers, for example, the most obvious beauties of nature, are not altogether and entirely useful in their purpose. A short time back the bees were set down as useless creatures. That was before the fertilization of the flowers was thoroughly understood. Imperfect knowledge ! Imperfect formation of eye and ear ! That was what produced our ideas of beauty and sound. The spectrum, for example, perfectly apprehended, was colourless. "Complete knowledge, you see, Mr. Niven, would extinguish art altogether. Happily for you, we have not yet arrived at that complete knowledge. These are the little nuts which science offers for dessert, you know. Very good for the teeth, you know, and for the digestion. All one's food shouldn't be digestible, you know."

"No," said David ; "some of it should be nice."

"A lover of the world as it is," said the scientist to Helen as he took leave, "a lover of the world as it is ! There's very little to be done with them—very little. I never met an artist who wasn't a child, and one can only treat them as children. Still, I should have bought something if I had genuinely admired what I saw. But I have my

own ideas of beauty and I really couldn't. The work strikes me as having a certain originality, but it is really so inartistic—as *I* conceive art."

Helen returned to David. He was packing away his work again savagely. He turned round.

"Silly old juggins ! Who let him out of his nursery, I should like to know," he said contemptuously. "Six years old's about his date, I should say. Never knew a scientist yet who could see for looking."

"You don't know many," Helen reminded him.

"Well, and how many artists does *he* know ?" asked David defiantly. "Old ass ! Beauty ! Spectrum ! Blow the spectrum !"

"He's perhaps right," said Helen, laughing.

"Why should he be ?" demanded David. "By his own bleat he's proved himself wrong. There's no such thing as right. If I'm imperfect in sight, so's he. I've as much right to say a thing's beautiful as him to say it's right. And besides, how does the bally old ass know that beauty isn't *useful* to me ? The bee hangs on for the pollen and honey because I suppose that's all he's thinking about. But why mayn't I hang on for the beauty and form ?"

"It's common sense he thinks you want probably," said Helen.

"Hang it !" said David. "Art's *all* common sense. *Make* his son an artist ! So he would, poor old fat-head. I say," he said after a short time, "wouldn't it be a sell if his old spectrum was only

a bit of another big one, and colour came back if you saw *that* properly. I jolly well hope it is, just to teach him. Life's too long for him, that's what's the matter. It needs an artist to take on an everlasting job like life. That old ass can't see the wood for the trees."

## Chapter Six

MARY DUTTON WAS SITTING IN the light of the window patching the sleeve of John's overcoat. She was frowning a little as she sewed. John was smoking his pipe on the settle. He, too, was in some speculation it seemed. Mary was the first to speak. As though her thoughts had been audible all the time, she said :

"Those young people have taken Polly Allgood's cottage for a year, she told me."

"Not long married, ain't they?" asked John, who could always join in at once to Mary's thinking aloud.

"I was at Polly to know why she'd put 'em in a room looking out on the graveyard. She said she never thought of it. It's not suitable," I said.

"I suppose not," said John.

"Some people never seem to think of things," went on Mary. "But I told her plain enough that it wasn't suitable to put young married people looking out on the graveyard. She says she's not got another room so good, but she won't draw the curtain in the mornings."

"She looks a nice-feeling young thing," said John.

"A bit wrought up," answered Mary. "That's why I said to Polly not to give her too much graveyard for her breakfast."



“ Polly ain’t much of a head-piece,” acquiesced John, and finding that his wife did not reply he went on with his own tale. “ There’s a how-d’ye-do up at Benjamin’s about this putting the clock onwards in summer. George—he’s the cowman—he says the sun’s always been a good friend to him and he ain’t going back on it, and Benjamin, he’ve put the clock according to law. Benjamin he gets up and wants his breakfast, and Emily, she says she ain’t going to get two breakfasts and they must settle it between them. *She* ain’t meddled with neither the sun nor the time, she says. George, he’s got a clock in the cowshed for himself and he won’t have Benjamin go near it for fear he alters it and puts him out. George says he’s like the hops—he goes with the sun.”

“ Emily’ll settle them,” said Mary.

“ No. She says they must settle it themselves,” said John. After a short silence he resumed : “ Old Joe Beresford he’s the man that goes with the sun. All over the place—in the garden, in the orchard, at the back of the hedge. There’s boxes turned up for him to sit on. Where the sun is—always providing there *is* any sun, there he’ll be. He’s like a clock himself—very nearly—and he very nearly makes as much noise. I goes past the other day, like a wild man hollerin’ he was. Flies was tormentin’ of him. Got a newspaper rolled up whacking at ’em. ‘ Be quiet, granfer ! There ain’t no living with you ! ’ Bertha she was going on at him.”

"You can't help it. He's getting old and childish," said Mary

"That's what I'll be some day, I suppose," said John.

"Want a bit of petting?" asked Mary demurely.

"I don't get much most days, except Saturdays," said John with a sigh. "Saturday night it's all right. When I comes back on Saturdays it's 'What would you like for your tea? Here's your slippers'—and all the rest of the week all kinds of impudence."

"I believe I've heard so before," said Mary.

"Do you remember when *we* was first married?" asked John.

"If I was to think very hard I might," said Mary.

"Well, if you remember now *we* was reckoned rather a superior couple. Got wedding presents, didn't we? Two loaf-tins and a pepper-caster, wasn't it?"

Mary laughed outright. "I've got the pepper-caster yet," she said. "It's only the other day I was turning out the cupboard on the stairs and I come on it. The loaf-tins wore out like I'm doing."

"Are you feeling a little the worse for wear?" asked John slyly.

"Like your old coat here," said Mary resignedly.

"Talking of my old coat reminds me," said John.

"You know that young man that does the hedges—a big young fellow with side whiskers—he heard tell of his cousin—lives in Gloucester somewhere—

got two suits of clothes burnt in a fire and any amount of money he got from the fire insurance. So what did young fellow-my-lad go and do but he burns two pairs of his old trousers in the back bedroom and then he writes to the fire insurance that *seven* pairs of trousers was destroyed. 'Tisn't exactly what I'd have advised him to do, but that's what he did."

"Did anybody come?" asked Mary.

"Oh yes! A young man come all right," replied John. "He never made no complaint about coming. He looks at the place in the back bedroom. 'Do you tell me,' he says, 'that seven pair of trousers was burnt in that place?' 'Yes, I do,' says William. 'How comes you to be having seven pairs of trousers?' he says. 'I had 'em!' says William. 'You had 'em and they got burnt,' he says. 'Now, *where's* the *buttons*?'"

"Hadn't anything to say for himself, I should think," said Mary.

"Not a word he hadn't," said John.

Mary looked out of the window. "There's a lot of good sunshine coming in," she said.

"It'll be the same as yesterday," said John. "It's very nice to look at now, but I've noticed it always rains when the sun's as yellow as that."

"I don't know what's put it into my head," Mary began—"whether it's talking of yellow sunshine or that willow-bush out in blossom, or Polly Allgood or what—I remember all at once a thing I saw when I was a young girl in service. It was

just such a day as this, I remember, there was a little child buried that got drowned in a cesspool. There was a lot of talk about it, for she was an orphan and she lived with her aunt and daughter, and when she was dead they had the farm. It would have come to the child if she'd grown up, and it looked bad. They talked a lot in the neighbourhood, and after, the farm went from bad to worse. Nobody'd go near the old woman and her daughter though they paid good money. It looked bad, you see. But I was only young and I remember the funeral best. They was just beginning High Church in those days, and all the little girls out of her class dressed in white frocks and carried lighted candles across the fields behind the coffin. I remember they came to a stile and they lifted the coffin over, and then all the children in white followed over carrying their candles. I've never forgotten the look of them lighted candles in the sunshine, going over the stile one by one. It made it seem as though it wasn't real. I suppose it's the sunshine to-day that makes me think of it." She broke off suddenly.

"Ain't that pig making itself heard? I wonder where it is? Smith's, I expect."

John rose from his chair, knocked his pipe on the grate and put it in his pocket. Then he opened the door into the garden and the sunshine entered immediately. Mary also rose as if to meet a visitor and went to the door.

"There ought to be some primroses out," she

said, going down the garden path. "Listen to the birds ! Don't the sunshine make 'em come alive ? Yes ! There's three or four primroses here, but they're hardly above the leaves yet."

A man standing in the sunlight in the field beyond the hedge, his figure conspicuously dark against the level green, called out to John : "Morning."

"How's the grass, Teddy ? " asked John.

"Very little to boast of," shouted the man. "You can't expect much when you have to put the cattle on before Christmas. Bites the heart out of the young grass. It don't get no chance to grow. Blind-hearted it is. Ain't this a nice bit of sun ? "

"We could do with a good deal of this," said Mary, moving a cloth from the hedge.

"We wants some fine weather to make the ground settle down," said the man. "It cuts up the ground so to take the carts across it. It ain't hardly possible to put on dung yet."

"Ground's a bit steadier though this day or two We can be getting on to it in the garden now," said John.

"It's like as if there's several climates just in this one field," said the man, pointing to the ridge above him. "Up at the top there I was wishing I'd brought my pipe and now down here it's as warm as a pocket."

The man walked a few steps and picked up his cap. Putting it on he said : "See that rabbit run across the road there ? I thought I had him safe

enough. Come straight over the road and ran in here. Thought I'd fallen on top of him and had him, but he's off somewhere. *I ain't got him,*" said the man.

"Wonderful shy they gets," said John.

"Pop ! I went on top of him as *I* thought," said the man, pointing to the hollow. "No ! he's off somewhere ; I daresay he's somewhere about watching me. Sitting up laughing at me, I'll be bound. I made sure I had him, too. I got my hands together like this and plop I went ! I didn't get him, though. He's too sharp. Straight over the road he came and into this grass here. He's out of it, though, all right. I didn't catch him."

## Chapter Seven

**J**UST BEFORE THE BURSTING OF leaf and brimming of streams which is visible springtime, the country has still days, days without sun, in which nevertheless life seems to stir, to vibrate, to fill the whole atmosphere even more than in days of sunshine. It is as if the earth itself moves and is conscious with unborn life. Soft and humid warmth seems to issue from the broken clods within whose darkness and silence multitudes of seeds are germinating. There is hardly a change in the hovering indigo of the sky resting above the ploughed levels. Something is stirring though hidden and silent. One does not yet walk through the fields watched by a myriad eyes from secret places. Life is not formed, only waiting, and hidden in warmth, slowly gathering growth.

The young wood-carver's wife, Elizabeth Niven, was walking homeward. She moved slowly, a slight and upright young figure, fatigued by the soft air and the balmy warmth of the morning. Something about her, an unconsciousness, a helplessness almost, gave her a very youthful appearance. Her charmingly pretty face had the appeal of a child's, with something of the softness of its bloom. Serious and gentle, it now was full of that steady listening and inward expression which one often observes on the faces of very young pregnant

women. The still and brooding content of the earth seemed to find its expression on the young mother's face. Something occupied, something apart, something waiting and expectant filled the morning. She was happy in that strange windlessness and quiet. Without understanding why, she felt herself part of it all, of that silence, of that contented waiting. There were enough sounds to bring her joy yet leave her thoughts uncaptured. An early thrush sang alone, sending out slow thrilling notes above the bare tree-tops. The penetrating notes sent at such long intervals were so unhurried, so chosen, that they seemed, too, to have a place in the spaciousness and openness of the morning, to be one with the slow increase of light and the swelling of warmth upon the patient land.

She sat down to rest on a cross-barred stile near a farmyard. There were men working within the recesses of a large barn whose doors were wide enough open to admit a waggon. Beneath an adjacent shed the farm carts were lying, resting, it seemed, almost as certainly as the cattle lying in the fields. There was a great litter of straw in the yard amid which two rough-coated calves were lying. The men in the barn were loading mangolds from a pile of orange-coloured and ruddy roots which had already begun a sickly green growth. The light piles of hop-stalks which had kept the store from frost lay about the floor of the barn. Strong scents came from the uncovered pile of mangolds and



from the trodden straw. The men, two of them, passed backwards and forwards in the shadow, now and then coming into the light of the wide-open doors. A soft thudding and shovelling was audible from within. The voices of the men came intermittently as they gossiped. They were talking about the re-laying of a drain where the road had fallen in after the snowstorm.

"You've got a drain hereabouts," said the surveyor.

"Yes," says Jack. "We're metalling this turnpike because of her."

"It's the drain I'm on the track of," said the surveyor. "It hadn't no business there."

The noise of sliding and rolling mangolds drowned the voices as the cart was tilted. One or two ran out into the yard and lay there. The voice went on.

"That old man ! You never saw such a hog-eared old chap ! Wouldn't have anything said to him. Had charge for years of the water-main, and when he give it up you never saw such a work as they had with it. Every joint he'd stuffed up somehow—old sleeves of his coat, pieces of his wife's petticoat, bits of clay and stones. It's a fair miracle any of it held together at all. They had to take the whole thing to pieces and lay new pipes. Took three of 'em three weeks to get the turbine to go again. And that old man he kept on at it. 'You never had nothing to spend on it all the time I had it,' he said ; 'nor you never had it go wrong,

neither.' Mary she's the same. 'Never was nothing went wrong with it when my old man had it,' she says. But you can't go on for ever with pipes mended with old petticoats, can you? The young man that took it on, he was fairly leaping with temper. 'That old man!' he kept on saying, 'I'd like you to take it on after him! If we've got to put straight all this, it'll spoil the look of twenty pounds,' he says."

Elizabeth rose and walked on. By the crossing of the lane with the high road was John Dutton's cottage. Mary, standing at the garden gate, looked at Elizabeth and smiled. She opened the gate. "Come in and rest a bit before you go on," she invited. Elizabeth turned in at the gate.

"I've just been sitting down on a stile over there," she said.

"You'll never go past here without looking in if you feel tired, will you, love," said Mary. "This is where I puts the key, look, under the thatch. Ain't it soft and balmy to-day," she went on. "I saw the first bee out here to-day, looking for crocus blooms he was, I expect. He didn't find nothing here. I saw the first ladybird, too, on one of them dead twigs. So life's on the move, it seems. Things are all waking up."

It was so tranquil and settled in the garden. Mary, standing in the open air with her thin grey hair, her sensible face and clean dress, her difficult years passed, seemed to have gained such control over all her affairs. The few early primroses under

the hedge, the first bee, the first ladybird, all seemed part of the orderly progression of the little old garden. How tranquil, how settled this peasant woman's existence ! The same rose-bush would cover the front of the cottage with pink blossoms ; the clump of orange lilies would thrust up their flaming heads again ; the southernwood was always at the gate ; the red-currant bushes behind the flower border ; the Japanese pear beneath the window ; the bee-hives in a row under the sunny side of the hedge. They would all give signs of life in their turn.

A gentle sunshine began now to fill the garden and the field and the road as if with affection. It seemed as though you just waited for life to move again in this tranquil and ordered place. Each appearance of it was known and, in its turn, expected. For change, you were content with those which the seasons brought to you. You fell into the custom of things and life budded and came about. It was the sunshine which seemed actively at work, and you acquiesced in its discriminating patience. Mary had come to this cottage no older than Elizabeth, she told her, and had never left it except for a week to visit her sister, and things had come to her, too—wisdom and experience, acceptance of life and its conditions, and kindness, too, for those who had yet to learn. A motherly, sheltering nature ! How wide, how benevolent the heart of the country looking out from the clear wide eyes of the peasant woman.

As Elizabeth sat on the bench within the porch a young woman looked over the gate. Mary turned at her voice. She was thin and undersized, with the assurance and self-possession of one accustomed to meet her kind, and her accent was strange in that village.

"Can you tell me the road to Wellow?" she asked.

"It's a long way to Wellow from here—about eight miles," said Mary. "You'll have to get on the turnpike again."

"They said we should cut off a bit coming this way," said the woman. "We're on the road hawking, you see, and we wanted to get to Wellow."

"What are you selling?" asked Mary. "Have you got a cart?"

"Lavender and scent: what we can carry. No: we're walking," replied the woman.

"Do you make a living at that?" asked Mary.

"Well, it's a living and it's not a living, as you may say," said the woman. "I was a spinner till I lost the good of my right arm, and now I can do nothing but this hawkin'. Do I turn to the left at the corner to get on to the turnpike?"

"It's the best you can do now," said Mary, "but you'll have to ask again farther on. There's not many houses."

The woman nodded and left the gate. Her footsteps sounded for a short distance in the still air and then ceased suddenly where the grass began at the roadside.

## Chapter Eight

THE COUNTRY'S NEW TO YOU,  
T ain't it? You wasn't brought up in it?"  
Mary asked the young mother.

"No," she answered; "and a good deal of it's strange still. I only remember single days at a time in the country when I was a child. I used to come here with my father, who came back now and then to his birthplace to see his parents. I always remember, I suppose because it was a holiday to us, that there seemed so much more time in the country and so much more space. If there wasn't room to do work in the house it could overflow out of doors and there was the feeling of all day to do it in. And how clean it used to look after the factory smoke. There was one day that reminded me of the seaside—so much moving whiteness there seemed. The white clouds and the white blossom in the orchards and the white clothes blowing in the sunlight. It used to seem all old people and young animals. Old men who chopped wood and fed calves, and old women in caps who used to look out of the windows."

"It was all strange to you," said Mary.

"And there was a day in summer, too," said Elizabeth. "It all seemed so much fuller and more hidden—to have happened suddenly, you know. The cottage with the old woman was there,

but she seemed so much farther off from the road. And there were white clothes hanging out in the garden, too, but there was so much more that you didn't notice them. And there didn't seem so much of the sky, either, and what there was was quite steady blue. Then you couldn't see the hens and their broods of chickens by the road because the grass was so long. All softer and fuller and crowding in upon you. That's what it seemed like."

"Ain't she a nice little thing!" Mary thought to herself. "She's too feeling, though," she added, looking at the quick animation of the girl's face as its changes gave the key to her thoughts.

"I always had the feeling that there was so much to give away in the country," went on Elizabeth gaily. "You just seemed to walk into any cottage and ask for things and people seemed to take it for granted and give you them. And I remember being stung by a wasp on my neck. We found a dock leaf and I held it on the swelling to cool it, and the next cottage we came to we knocked at the door and asked the woman for some carbonate of soda. She asked us in, and it smelt all so clean—of apples and buttermilk and clean clothes being ironed. And then she rummaged in a cupboard and got the soda and made a paste and smeared it on my neck. And she gave me a pear and tied a string on it and dipped it into the copper first to scald it in case I should get summer cholera. There was a yellow cat sitting in the chair and a stuffed fox."

“ You was a noticing little thing,” said Mary.

“ There seemed such a lot of everything to me,” said the younger woman. “ They always talked of my grandfather and granny as very poor people. But there seemed to be all sorts of things in their house which I never saw in the town except in shops. Raspberries and currants and piles of apples in the bedroom upstairs, and roses all over the wall, and honey, and all the outside things—the hens, and the sow, and the pony, and cows and fields, too, and a hay-stack. Oh ! it was lovely ! I was always so sorry to go back.”

“ Well, now you’ve come to stop,” said Mary cheerfully.

“ David says the country’s the place for poor people to live in,” said the little mother happily.

“ Especially for children,” she said shyly.

Mary looked at her maternally. “ You don’t know what it is yet, do you ? ” she said. “ Don’t you get frightened. I’ve had four. There’s nothing to be frightened of.”

“ I’m not frightened,” said Elizabeth. “ I’m very happy.”

“ I’ve just been up helping that young woman whose husband got lost in the snow-storm,” said Mary. “ The child’s all right, but, oh, it is pitiful to hear her going on. ‘ You don’t know what it is,’ she keeps saying, ‘ to be lying here like this and there isn’t a man to come into the room and tell you he’s glad. It’s awful lonely,’ she says. Come and look at the first lot of chickens I’ve got

out," said Mary, rising and opening the orchard gate.

She stooped to gather five primroses which grew at the root of a crooked apple tree and gave them to Elizabeth.

"You value them when they're so few," she said.

Elizabeth gave an exclamation of pleasure. Mary liked to please. She smiled. The tiny yellow chicks ran about in the grass happily. At the sight of the women, the mother hen fluttered and clucked excitedly and the tiny yellow stream was absorbed by the whirlpool of maternal concern within the coop.

Mary stood looking at the spreading wings which, too small for flying, were yet wide enough to cover all that twittering confidence.

"You get to understand a lot when you've had a child," she said in a quiet tone, watching the nestling, clucking mother. "It's like as if you get a knowledge of other things, too, with it. No, love, I'm not going to hurt any of them."

She stooped and raised the hatch of the coop. "There ! come out yourself and you'll be satisfied. Ain't she pleased to follow them herself !"

Elizabeth walked homewards tranquilly. Soft clouds were passing overhead. Young calves were gathered about the hedges. Little flocks of shadows lay in the broken furrows and a wide gilding sunlight clothed the bare fields with its protection. The remembrance of the hen and her chickens in the sunlit orchard gave an odd little balance of



contentment to Elizabeth's happiness. The little life was stirring, stretching itself safely and contentedly. She was covering, protection, gift for it, too. How near it was, and how it took her for granted, taking anything it wanted of her strength. This stirring happiness was wonderful. She had never known anything so deep, so astonishing, so illuminating. She was almost sorry for David that he had nothing so wonderful.

As she walked slowly down the lane looking for primroses in the high sunny bank lit with new green, a young girl was coming up, walking heavily, a shawl drawn round her figure. Elizabeth recognized her as a young servant who had lost her character. The girl's face, at the same time shamefaced and impudent, softened agreeably at Elizabeth's good-morning.

"Both in the same boat, seemingly," she said audibly as she passed.

Elizabeth hurried for a few steps lest the girl should say more. She reddened a little and then wondered why she should have minded. She had felt like that when a man, glancing casually at her, had looked again and winked. She suddenly wished that David were there, and seemed to have lost heart in the day.

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## Chapter Nine

WELL, DAVID ! WORKING HARD ?  
What a lovely thing that is ! How's Elizabeth ? ”

Helen looked round the studio with an acute glance which seemed to take in every object there. People sometimes trembled a little before the alert and searching scrutiny which she brought to their affairs. A certain kind of woman would go away from Helen's contact sulky, talking to the first person she met about being thankful that she wasn't a clever woman. She knew for certain that men didn't like clever women. And a certain kind of man would assent quite loudly, that, for himself, he liked a homy woman, the sort of give-and-take, broad-minded kind.

Helen was beautiful, vivid, fine, poised ! “ Never got herself out of drawing,” David used to say. Her manners were gracious and sympathetic, but towards women always a little warmer, a little more gracious than towards men. From the latter she uncompromisingly claimed their best.

Her beauty was unusual in type, hair of a very bright gold, eyes a warm hazel in an almost colourless skin, features delicate and well-bred, that rare complexion which appears now and then with the value of something exotic among the dark-toned women of South Europe.

It had been taken for granted that a woman so unexpected and fine in type must have received (and refused) many offers of marriage. But she had never had any. Her very fineness and completeness seemed to be against it. Perhaps the wish not to destroy so admirable a friend, the desire not to let that fineness "get out of drawing", and, a little, the sense that Helen herself valued other qualities in herself than those which must be most active in marriage, had brought men for their own sakes to keep her at a distance. People were always glad to know her, and her friendship when she gave it was sincerely valued.

David's consistent opinion of her was that she had everything to learn since she wasn't an artist, but that she showed a certain discrimination in liking his work. He had frowned upon a recently expressed wish of hers to study painting.

"What's the good of that?" he said. "Then you'll think you know about art and begin to talk to artists about it."

"I see!" Helen had said; "and you wouldn't like that."

Nevertheless she had not taken up painting as a study.

"Won't she be hurt?" said Elizabeth, distressed.

"What for?" asked David. "She'd be far better buying pictures than making them."

"How's Elizabeth?" asked Helen again.

"All right," said David.

"Sure?" demanded Helen. "How does she spend the day?"

"She'll be better for that when the baby's born," said David. "She'll have something to keep her mind busy."

"You think she needs it, then?" asked Helen with a slight smile, watching David's supple hands at work. What skill, what finesse, and what concentration! What beauty growing within the wood, and what beauty, too, in the man's face and earnestness.

"Needs what?" he asked.

"Mental occupation," replied Helen, watching the delicate knife pick at the wood.

"Well, what has she got?" asked David. "The doctor said it was better to keep her mind as quiet as she could for a while. 'Lead a sort of cow-like existence,' he said."

Helen laughed. "Did he tell you how it was to be managed?" she asked.

"Well, it's all right, isn't it?" demanded David irritably.

"Motherhood's a big intellectual thing, and you can't make it otherwise for Elizabeth," she said.

"How do you know? You've never been married," said David rudely.

Helen looked at him. "You haven't perhaps observed my eyes and ears nor noticed my intelligence," she said. "It's all right, David dear. I'm not going to presume on the fact of my having

paid your fees for you. You paid that debt long ago by doing credit to my judgement."

"Well, the doctor ought to know, oughtn't he?" said David, less savagely. "He's quite right, you know, to keep things to the normal."

"What *has been* the normal," corrected Helen. "Perhaps the normal changes as disease itself changes. I grant that it's easier *not* to enlarge the horizon of the normal. But it's Elizabeth I want to know about."

"Elizabeth's all right! She's looking very pretty just now," protested David.

"That's encouraging, at any rate. She's probably finding it out for herself."

"Finding *what* out?" cried David. "I wish you wouldn't put a tragic pitfall in every sentence you speak. Elizabeth's going to have a child. Well! Lots of women have had children before this, haven't they? Elizabeth's a bit neurotic, the doctor says. Do her all the good in the world to have a child."

"And being Elizabeth and a bit neurotic, as he says, he and you propose that by some strange arrangement of nature which you, neither of you, trouble to explain or bring about, she shall at once turn into the peasant woman whom it is so convenient to you both to regard as the 'normal' mother," said Helen.

"Look here, Helen," shouted David, throwing the knife into his tool-box. "What do you mean by coming here and upsetting my work like this?"

"If the sky fell we should all catch larks," said Helen drily. "You've married Elizabeth, dear little Elizabeth with her face like an Italian madonna. You'd love to see her a mother. If you were a painter you'd paint her incessantly with her baby. Probably that's how those adorable child-madonnas *were* painted and why. However, I'll give you people credit for unrightness in one thing. You find Elizabeths grown old as good models for your St. Annes, as they were for your madonnas when they're young."

"You're too clever for me," said David. "Elizabeth's all right, and I'm very fond of her."

"I'm sure you are, and she of you," said Helen. "Does she ever tell you what she's thinking about?"

"What should she be thinking about?" asked David.

"That means she doesn't tell you," said Helen. "You talk to her all about your work and what you're thinking, and she listens."

"Well! It's important to talk about my work," said David.

"Of course it is! Very important! And I'm quite sure Elizabeth thinks so too. But I warn you there are things going on in Elizabeth's head which she'll want help with. You like her sensibility, her gentleness, her sympathy. They give you the right atmosphere for your work. But Elizabeth's passionate, too. You haven't wakened that, or, at least, any more than you need of it for your own

purposes. But she'll be a fiercer mother because of it."

"Here she is," said David, smiling brightly.

Helen's face was always charming when it looked at Elizabeth.

"Yes, David," she said. "I give you credit for perception. Elizabeth is looking very pretty just now."

Elizabeth blushed. "Did David say so?" she asked.

"Said it and thinks it," said Helen.

There was no question of David's pride in his wife. He kissed her with fondness. They were really very pretty together, Helen thought. David held Elizabeth and looked at her for a moment or two. Then he said :

"You're all right, aren't you, Elizabeth?"

"Yes, of course I'm all right," replied Elizabeth.

"You don't want anything, do you?" he pressed.

"No : what should I want?" asked Elizabeth.

"Of course she doesn't want anything," said Helen. "She's got David. Good-bye, you dear little people. Forgive, David!"

## Chapter Ten

THE STUDIO DOOR WAS OPEN FOR the sunshine, which warmed the room and saved David the trouble of lighting the fire. John Dutton carried a parcel discreetly to the door and looked in. David, his fair head visible behind a large frame, was at work. Shavings lay about on the floor of the quiet workshop, and in the shaft of sunlight which divided the room a myriad motes were illumined.

"I wish you good-morning, sir," said John, searching David's face for a rebuff.

"Oh, good-morning, John ! You've brought it straight here, have you ? Bring it in. Put it on top of that case."

"I said, sir," said John, staggering in with his parcel and laying it on the case, "I said : ' Now it ain't no use for to disturb them in the house. It'll only mean they've got to get up and carry it to the yard.' So I bringed it right over myself."

"Thank you," said David, already at work with his screw-driver on the lid.

"I said one day to myself as I was coming past : ' Now I've been past this place a many times and I've never once seen the inside of it. Next time I haves a parcel to take and I finds the master agreeable, I'll look in at 'en and see what sort of things he's making of in there. I hears tell of 'em



and I was reading about some of 'em in the papers, but I ain't seen none of 'em. So next time I'm passing by, I says, I'll look in.' "

" Oh ! " ejaculated David, prizing open the lid. " Oh yes ! This seems all right. Well, what would you like to see ? I haven't got very much here now. Here's some carving on this panel, to go inside a church, you know. What do you think of it ? "

" I think it's capital," declared John with deliberation. " Capital ! You've filled in the space very neat. Proper ! Yes ! You ain't left much over ! Capital ! "

" I'm glad you like it," said David.

" Yes, I likes it," returned John. " Now, sir, I've always been of this opinion : I've never seen a man do a thing yet but what I could make a very fair imitation of it—very fair. But I couldn't do anything like this. You're my master, sir. I couldn't do it."

" Thank you." David laughed.

" You makes a very fair living, I suppose ? " asked John slyly.

" Like everybody else—it might be better," said David.

" Now, sir," said John, " I wants to ask you, as a gentleman knowing how to work, what do you think now of all these 'ere strikes and things that goes on ? Now I'll tell you my belief about it. Look how they goes on upsetting of all the traffic in the country. Why, there's hundreds of bright pounds to the bad. I'm telling you my belief, sir,

that if everything was properly arranged there ain't no need of such things at all."

"You'll not stop them till you get better conditions," said David.

"Now this is what I'm asking of you, sir : *why* can't you stop 'em? When I was working along with Mr. Parrott now, he says to me one day— 'Come in, John!' he says. 'I wants you to sign a paper.' 'Well,' I says, 'I'm quite agreeable to sign a paper if you wants me to, but first of all I should like to know what it is I'm a-signing of.' 'Oh!' he says, 'I'll explain that to you. I've got a contract and I wants a witness.' 'Then I'm agreeable to sign,' I says, and I did it. Now I'd been thinking for a long time that I was worth a shilling a week more'n I was getting from him, so I speaks to him deliberately and I tells him, 'You know, sir,' I says, 'never part from a good servant! You're satisfied with me, but I ain't quite satisfied with what I gets from you!' 'Well,' he says (he laughed, you know, too), 'and what do you think you're worth?' 'I suppose,' I said in reply, 'I suppose another shilling a week wouldn't harm you?' 'No,' he says, 'I don't suppose it would. You shall have it,' he says. There wasn't no unpleasant words said and we parted in satisfaction. Now, sir, that's how I looks upon it. If everybody was to do the same there wouldn't be any need of these here strikes. Everybody'd be satisfied."

"I doubt if they would," said David. "*You* left Mr. Parrott, didn't you?"

“ Well, that was in the course of time,” said John. “ Of course you must allow a little for that. You can’t always stop where you begins, you know. Now, for example. Gentleman living down my way he have a laurel hedge. Planted very high over the road it is. Heavy-headed like. Growed too high. ‘ It’ll be down in the road soon,’ says the roadman. ‘ Well,’ I says, ‘ if you cuts it back now it’ll last a twelvemonth like that. I shouldn’t have ’en cutten back fur ! A wonderful shelter he be to the garden ! No ! I shouldn’t only cutten back a little. He don’t want to be cut hard in, only a trifle. Now,’ I says to the roadman, ‘ if you goes and sees Mr. James and tells him so, there won’t be no trouble about that hedge. You can go and get your hook and then take and sweep it all before you as you works down the road.’ That’s what I said to ’en and that’s what he did. There weren’t no trouble at all with the overseer, and Mr. James he give the roadman a trifle.”

“ I see,” said David, who had been all the time unpacking his box. “ You think things can be settled like that ? ”

“ I think so, sir,” said John. “ Anyway, there ain’t no harm in trying of it,” as Mary says.

“ How’s your wife ? Face-ache gone ? ” asked David.

“ She’s better,” said John. “ You’re going to have an increase, ain’t you ? ”

David stopped for a second in his unpacking. It

hadn't seemed anybody's business but his. "Yes," he said.

"You mustn't let her worry. That's the great thing," said John. "I'll allow she ain't nothing to worry about, but they makes worries, women. There's Mary. She's a great hand at worrying. I plagues her about it sometimes. She can't help but smile at me. One day now, she was breaking an egg as I was coming into the kitchen and I makes her jump and the egg was on the floor directly. 'There now !' she says, and she scoops it up with a spoon. 'Well,' I says, 'now it ain't lost nothing by that, has it?' Another time she was fussing about a slug she'd seed in the cabbage when she was washing of it. She'd lost him, understand, and she couldn't find him again. 'Well, he'll have to go in the pot,' she says. 'I can't find him.' 'Never mind,' says I, 'it'll save us a bit of meat, won't it?' 'I hopes you gets him,' she says. 'Well, if I does,' I says, 'I'll make a sacrifice and I'll hand him over to you.' She has a laugh at *me*, though, over one thing. It was one time she was in bed with lumbago. Only time I ever knowed of her having of it, and you can't get up when you've got it bad. 'I'll cook the dinner,' I says. 'Well,' she says, 'mind you puts on the potatoes in good time.' And I forgot about them potatoes. I put 'em on all right, understand, but I forgot about them when they was on. By and by Mary she calls out: 'Ain't you had your dinner yet, John?' and I hurries and looks at the potatoes. All of a flop

they was. I didn't hardly like to face Mary, but, however, I did. 'Well,' she says, 'you won't make no cook, I think,' and all I says was: 'They was *done*, wasn't they, them potatoes?' But sometimes now when I sees Mary looking in the pot and smiling to herself I hies me out. Going to have a laugh at me, I knows, about them taters. Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning," said David. "Look here! You can take this empty case back with you now. I've screwed the lid down again."

"I'll do that, sir, if you puts it on to my back," said John.

He staggered for a moment as the weight rested on his shoulders, then disappeared from the studio.

## Chapter Eleven

HOW BEAUTIFUL THE WILLOW-  
H bush was becoming. Elizabeth, seeing it from the field-path, went over the grass to look at it. Radiant and gentle flames seemed to burn in a soft fire at the brink of the oozing grey water, brimming now with the burden of snow melted on far-away slopes. On the margin of the stream the meadow-grass lay along the surface, stretching out with languid undulations as the flood crept slowly along. The willow, lovely and unconscious, in a lonely glory, seemed to have been lighted and left there by some herald and to be waiting in motionless patience for his further purpose. The sunlight seemed to hover above it for a moment before it sped on over the fields. With the movement of the scarcely perceptible breeze a swarm of golden fiery bees seemed to move at its heart. The eyes sought it from a distance over the sombre earth as they seek a lighted altar within a shadowed sanctuary. The bush rustled and the flame seemed to move. From the roots a dark bit of animation stirred and a moor-hen launched herself silently upon the water. She was followed by four chicks, who swam with quick random, excited, paddling here and there on the sluggish water. Across the narrow grey barrier of the river was the sheep-fold full of its perpetual bleating echoes. From the still-

ness and secrecy of the earth itself life was issuing. Living things were coming out into the sunshine. Stable doors were open. All around the farms living creatures were clustering. The birds' songs were filling the woods with yearning and longing. Tremor, hesitation, then long ecstasy thrilled the quiet air with the agitation and love of a hundred shy and hidden throats. Mary, returning from the village, caught sight of Elizabeth as she passed the field-gate. She called and waited. Elizabeth turned and, waving her hand, came towards her up the meadow. The two women walked side by side in the direction of Mary's cottage, Elizabeth slight and girlish by the side of Mary's upright and confident vigour. Mary began to talk tranquilly.

"I never come past that gate without looking over it. It reminds me of the time when the children was all little and I never had time to go farther than that gate. Just a look over the gate at the cowslips in the meadow. Only a look. I used to feel quite different for the rest of the morning. Why, there's Katie Logan."

She broke off as the young girl who had spoken to Elizabeth in the lane came in sight. She looked at the girl without either severity or curiosity, and replied to her "good-morning" quietly. She made no comment, but held open the gate for Elizabeth to pass in, glancing at her face as she passed.

"You're not worrying about that girl, are you?"

she asked shrewdly, as Elizabeth was silent. "You mustn't get things into your mind. You're far better to talk about it."

"She spoke to me the other day," said Elizabeth slowly. "I don't suppose she really meant to be rude."

"What did she say?" demanded Mary.

"Both in the same boat, seemingly," quoted Elizabeth, and added: "I suppose we are, in a way."

"Well, you are and you aren't. There's a lot of difference, and so Miss Impudence will find out before long," said Mary.

"I wonder why." Elizabeth's face was shadowed. "She's about the same age as I am. She'll go through this for the first time just as I shall, and she won't have any one to help her. She must have known love, I suppose, and she'll have all the responsibility of the child when it's born."

Mary looked considerably at Elizabeth. The coral red of the Japanese pear was like a jewelled bush on the white wall of the cottage. She broke off one or two heads and gave them to her.

"There's a bit of wallflower out, too. I'll find it for you. Here it is! Smell it, love! I always think of blackbirds singing and wallflowers in that border together."

"Beautiful!" said Elizabeth, the trouble receding from her eyes as she looked deep into the



living red of the exotic flower and held the cool ruby wallflower against her cheek. They both sat on the narrow wooden seat in the porch. Mary had made up her mind.

“ You’d better talk it over if you’re thinking about it,” she said. “ As far as Katie Logan’s concerned, it’s the character she’s had before that accounts for her being looked down on. I don’t know about ‘ love ’ with *her*. There’s a good many of these young girls curious, and then they’re ignorant, too, and they get themselves into trouble before they’ve ever thought about love. I don’t know that I’ve ever really thought about it before, though I’ve helped one or two girls through. There’s generally something behind what people thinks, though I’ve known opinion cruel sometimes.” She paused and then continued. “ I suppose the baby has the right to both its parents or it wouldn’t need two to make it.”

“ But that’s the man’s fault with Katie Logan, isn’t it ? ” Elizabeth defended.

“ Of course it is,” agreed Mary, “ but you see it’s hers, too, in a way. She ought to have kept to herself till she was sure he’d be responsible to her for it. I suppose that’s where the fault is. They’ve both of them thought of themselves and not of the child. And the child needs thinking of. They’ve both of them failed it. That’s what it is, I fancy. Being married isn’t in the beginning: it’s far more in the keeping on. And if you have children you must *both* do your best. It’s like putting something

round them they ought to have by rights, and you can't tear half of it away without doing harm somewhere. At least that's how I seems to see it now you ask me. I don't know that I've ever given it a name before. But don't you trouble about her now. I'll promise you *I'll* see to Katie Logan if she needs it. You've got your own child to think of and from now on'll be your best time. John was reading a bit out of the paper about your husband. Spoke very high of him. 'Won't she be proud !' says John. 'That I'm sure she will,' I said. 'Are you going to look after her ?' he says. 'If she asks me I will,' I says. 'Well,' says John, 'you talk to her about her husband. *That'll* keep her happy ! Husbands ain't enough thought of some places,' he says. I tell him he ought to be ashamed wanting all that petting."

"You're so kind," said Elizabeth. "I *should* like you to help me."

"Oh, I love the little things. How any one can be cruel to them I can't tell. Good-bye, love. You come along here whenever you likes."

Mary stood smiling cheerfully at the gate watching Elizabeth as she went towards the corner of the lane. When she reached it, she turned and waved her hand happily to Mary. Mary nodded, watched her turn the corner, and herself turned back from the gate. She saw that the stew on the fire was not cooking too fast, pushed in the damper, then opened the door at the foot of the stairs and went up. She opened one drawer after another of

a chest in the back bedroom, examining such appliances for nursing as she had. Presently she shut the drawers and went down again.

“ It does put you in mind of things again,” she said aloud.

## Chapter Twelve

THE COUNTRY LAY AS IF DISPLAY-  
T ing itself, arranged, adorned, conscious of  
the sun's inspection. Every tree stood in  
light. Every field spread its green before the level-  
ling sunshine. The sky was ready for a festival.  
What matter that the leaves would fall and the  
winter wind scourge the bare branches, that the  
fields would one day be sodden and dank? The  
whole landscape shone with bravery and the  
gleaming clouds seemed to move to a measure  
full of a gay wind.

Helen was watching Elizabeth. Self-controlled  
and critical, but generous and ardent in spirit,  
she found herself all the time being impelled to  
put out a hand to ward off hurt or alarm from  
the gentle young mother.

"It's like watching a child walking on the edge  
of a cliff," she had said to Mary, who laughed  
gently and tranquilly.

"You wouldn't be so nervous if it was yourself,"  
she said. "It isn't as if *she* knows, you know.  
*She* don't feel like you do. They grows together,  
you see. It isn't as if she'll be alone. She'll learn  
a lot from the baby. It's another way, you see.  
It's like as if you're working it all out, and she ain't  
one of them that can't love."

"Little Elizabeth a mother!" said Helen. "It's

what she ought to be, of course. You can't think of her as anything else. But I wish I could save her."

Mary laughed again. "You'll have to leave it to her," she said. "She's one of them that goes deep into things. You learn a lot by living on."

Helen had gone out into the garden to look at the tinted beauty of the hayfield. As she had reached the flower-border she paused. Elizabeth was standing motionless before a group of tall virgin lilies. Her expression was that of an attentive and serious child. Something so innocent, so untried, so appealing was in her absorption with the flowers that Helen felt again that longing to cover and shelter her inexperience, and again the impotence before the powers of life which were at work for the little mother. The lilies stood upright and green. So long as the green calyx was closed no one noticed the hidden living growth. But on this day when the sun's power was almost handling the flower-buds the calyx gave way. The white fold offered itself and was still. A golden bee hovered about it, crawling to the involutions of the moist white fragrance, then blundered angrily away, disappointed. The powerful heat surrounded the stem and the flower dared and was ready. The purity of something never seen before was disclosed, the golden throat opened undimmed, the lovely thing happened and the lily stood holy and fragrant with life. The sun caressed it and the waiting air was full of the offered perfume.

How ineffable, how quiet, how irresistible was life !

Helen drew near and saw Elizabeth's rapt and shining face. Elizabeth and the lily. After all perhaps it was the innocent who dared life and were most right. Elizabeth would surely learn by living on. As Helen came nearer she turned her quiet eyes towards her and said :

" I wanted to be the first to see this lily open. No one has ever seen it before—not even God. It was lovely. Just like my baby will be."

" You aren't afraid of anything, Elizabeth dear ? " asked Helen.

" Afraid ? No ! Why should I be," Elizabeth replied.

## Chapter Thirteen

THE HAYFIELD WITH THE SHORT cut was impassable now, shining from hedge to hedge like some sheltered and sunny lake. Now and then a sighing music seemed to sound in the midst of its coloured depths. No foot had fallen there for months. Only winged things had passed over it—the birds seeking hiding and safety, the bees and insects and the winged seeds journeying on and on over the warm and scented secrecies. The song of the larks, from daybreak through the whole day, was like a stationary windy music overhead, and from side to side of the field, from hedge and tree, came the chanted monotone of the woodland birds. How much you learned of the country by sitting quiet, and how full of sound the silent fields and lanes really were. Restlessness seemed out of place as you looked at the drowsy depths of the hayfield, where sweet and living grasses made a swaying melody from dawn to dark.

“Wonderful!” said Helen to David. “Silver and lilac harp-strings and a melodious secret which always is on the point of being told and which always eludes our capture.”

“I once tried to paint a hayfield like that,” said David. “Impossible! Couldn’t do it.” He stooped from the stile and plucked two long ripe

grasses. He looked at them with a smile, stroking them through his nervous pointed fingers. Then he threw them away and got up. "Impossible !" he repeated.

"God the Father beats you every time," said Helen, smiling, too.

"He's a better artist than I am, if you mean that, but hang it all ! what's omnipotence for ?" replied David.

They passed John Dutton's cottage. John, laying out the contents of his tool-box on a large flat stone near the back door, caught sight of David. He held up a small saw. David and Helen turned through the yard and joined him.

"It's astonishing how they gets tired," he observed, feeling the edge of the saw. "It ain't no use for to sharpen of 'em. You can sharpen and sharpen when they're like this and you won't get 'em to work for you. I shall have to put 'em to bed to rest it off."

"Looks as though that one had better be put in his coffin," said David.

"No ! He ain't quite ready for that," said John seriously ; "though he's getting on, I'll allow. But he's *tired*, no doubt about that, and I fancy that's the case with this chisel now. I'll put 'em both up on a shelf for a week or two. It's very funny how they tells you about it. You'd think they didn't feel nothing now. And Mary now, when she've got all the irons hot she'll say all of a sudden, 'Well !' she'll say, 'isn't it provoking ?



This one's lost its temper. I shan't be able to do nothing with it all the afternoon !' "

He turned the box over. " I was going to wash him," he said, holding up a brush, " but I think it's hair-restorer he wants." He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. " Do you know, mam," he said, with the air of a man who has just discovered something, " it's a funny thing how things jump into your head. I'd no sooner said hair-restorer than I thought of that old woman by the blacksmith's. I daresay now it was because I once heard it said that she had a wig on. I shouldn't be surprised. But however, whoever told it me told me wrong, for I enquired of her daughter. ' No,' she says, ' John, that isn't the case.' But this is how I was thinking of that old woman. Understand, she lives with her son. He's wonderful fond of her. Every night you must understand he makes up a fire in her bedroom. ' It's same as living to old people to have a fire,' he says, and then he says, ' Good-night, Mother,' and she answers him back, ' Good-night,' and he goes off. But now, that old woman, she's terrible frightened of fire, and as soon as she hears him go to bed, up she gets and pours water on her bedroom fire and puts it out. What worries me is how he don't never seem to find out. Don't seem to be practical. That's what's wrong with him, I fancy."

" Seems so," said David.

Mary appeared at the garden gate, a cabbage leaf full of raspberries in her hand. Helen moved

towards her. Recollecting, she turned her face back to John. "Can you give me the words of that song, John?" she asked.

John looked a little self-consciously at Mary before he replied: "I can give you the first two verses all right."

"I've got *them*," said Helen. "It's the rest of the song I want."

"I daresay it could be found out," said John, deliberating.

"You don't know it then?" wheedled Helen.

"Oh yes! I daresay I could remember it," John admitted.

"Couldn't you try?"

Helen, glancing at Mary, saw her eyes fixed on her husband. John saw them too.

"Well, you see, mam," he said, "it's like this. *I* knows that song all right, and I daresays I could tell it *you*, but the words is clumsy for a girl."

David laughed aloud.

"I'd better go and talk to Mary," said Helen, laughing too.

"Wonderful good-looking, ain't he?" said Mary.

"I does fancy a fine-looking man."

"What do you think of him?" Helen asked her.

Mary looked at Helen as if wondering how much she might say.

"He's clever, ain't he?" she asked.

"Very!" said Helen emphatically. Mary looked at David again.

"I don't think it'll matter so long as *she* doesn't find out," she said at last.

"You think he takes what he wants and leaves the rest?" Helen guessed a little ruefully.

"She'll have a lot, you know, in the baby and perhaps more to come," said Mary placidly. "She's a loving little thing. She won't find out perhaps, and he wants *something*, you know."

"Not what she wants most to give, though," said Helen.

"You never know," said Mary.

John's voice sounded loud in contempt. The two women were silent. He was speaking of his niece who had been helping in the haymaking.

"High-heeled shoes catching in the hay and a hat all cock-eyed on her head. What's she want to come haymaking in clothes like them for?"

"Sensible—I suppose that's what the old chap wants in his women's clothes," said David as they went away.

"Well, David, I lay it on you," said Helen, "aren't a sunbonnet and a cotton dress better for haymaking than high-heeled shoes and hats with trimmings? If you're out to disturb an old traditional wisdom, be very sure you've got as sound a thing to put in its place. Even the trite sayings of the peasants which tickle you come out of a sort of inherited wisdom. It's not the tradition which *you're* accustomed to and it strikes you as funny. If they had your mind and spirit-training they'd think as you do—perhaps—I don't even

know that. But they haven't. They've got a wisdom which they've, so to speak, dug up for themselves. You call it 'character' in old people. Look at Mary. I've heard you say she's like 'daily bread'."

"So she is," said David. "Jolly glad she's going to look after Elizabeth."

## Chapter Fourteen

DAVID HAD MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE of Elizabeth in the country. Admiring the work of a wood-carver in an exhibition of arts and crafts, he had sought him out and followed him to his country studio. For a few months he had remained his devoted disciple, but in David discipleship was always a step to the master's place and he soon outgrew his instructor. It was at the point when he became aware that he was as good a carver as the man who taught him that he met Elizabeth.

Elizabeth, who lived in town with an elderly aunt, was that day in the country by chance. She was on the point of entering her training as a teacher of blind children, having been impressed by the older woman who had come with her for the day into the country. She, middle-aged and with a vocation, had found Elizabeth an awe-struck listener on the one occasion on which they had met. She was pleased with the sympathy and admiration which the young girl had given to her. Grown a little arid in her struggle to establish the importance of her work, the girl's freshness and quickness of feeling had been a renewal to her of ideals grown hard in outline. Elizabeth would have to earn her living. She was not difficult of persuasion. She was soon induced to join the older

woman in her work and to offer herself as a teacher of blind children. To find a suitable house and garden for an establishment had been the object of the excursion.

"Well, I don't want to drag you about any longer," she had said to Elizabeth. "Your aunt won't think me a fit person to have charge of you if I bring you home tired out. You sit still in that hayfield while I go on and look at this place. If it seems any more use than the others I'll come back for you."

Elizabeth wasn't tired, she said, but the other insisted. When David, thinking out the idea of a decoration for an oak pulpit, passed the hayfield he saw a girl sitting in a bright blue dress, her hat beside her and her uncovered hair gleaming like beech leaves in autumn mist. He lingered. "I wonder who that is," he thought. Elizabeth turned round and saw David. They looked at one another without turning away. David crossed the stile and approached.

"Would you mind sitting to me for a short time?" he asked. "I'm a wood-carver and I want a seated woman's figure for a design I'm doing."

"I should like to, if you think I'm good enough," said Elizabeth.

David had begun to draw and Elizabeth sat on. She glanced once or twice at David and each time his approving face filled her with content and elation. She felt proud to have been asked to sit

as a model, as if she were really beautiful. She hoped he would be a long time. She felt so happy and quiet under his scrutiny. She could sit there always if he wanted her to, while he looked at her so attentively and was so pleased with her.

David, drawing the slight girl's figure, *was* pleased. He liked her confiding and docile manner. By and by he felt the impulse to show her his drawing and tell her of the carving he was thinking out. He liked the sweetness and candour of her smile as she looked up to show that she understood. He wondered again who she was and where she lived. He asked her and she told him. He told her about the wood-carver's studio and his work there. "If I had a studio of my own!" he kept saying. Elizabeth longed to give him one. She was sure he would do all that he said he could. He showed her the design for the bowl he had been carving—wood, gilded, for a glass basin to slip inside. She had never imagined anything so beautiful, and he was showing it to her and talking to her about it as though she knew, and she knew nothing about arts and crafts. She could learn, of course. She *would* do so as soon as she got home. He came over beside her and all at once laid his hand on her hair. She did not move. Her eyes turned gravely towards him as he began suddenly to fasten up his sketch-book.

"Are you going away?" she asked with an odd dejection.

"Yes, I think so," said David, not going. "Your

dress is a beautiful colour. It goes so well with your hair," he said.

Elizabeth told him she had made it herself, but her aunt thought it too noticeable.

"Out here in the fields it doesn't seem too bright a colour, does it?" she asked.

"It isn't too bright for you anywhere," said David.

"Elizabeth dear, we shall miss the train," interrupted the decided voice of her companion for the day. "How-do-you-do?" she added as David turned.

"I must go, I'm afraid," said Elizabeth.

David stayed in the hayfield.

"Have you been talking to that young man long?" asked her companion drily.

"Not very long. Hasn't he a beautiful face?" said Elizabeth.

"Like a barber's block," said her companion with a bitter little flash of jealousy. She knew she had lost the gentle and docile assistant she had almost gained in her work for blind children, and she had never had any one whom she had liked so much.



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## Chapter Fifteen

“YOU MUST TRY TO SLEEP NOW,”  
Y Mary had said warningly ; “ you mustn’t  
lie awake thinking.”

Elizabeth lay very quiet. She was glad everybody had gone. She recognized the objects in the room one by one as she could see them, her head low on the pillow. How accustomed and still it was with the sunshine streaming in and lying like a coverlet upon the bed ! There was a sort of healing coming in from these inanimate things. The little Japanese silver box was there, the ivory hair-brush, and the reproduction of Rembrandt’s Titus. The sunlight was a comforting presence in the room. She remembered something about “ windows opened to the sun-rising ”. They had left her alone to go to sleep. But the sunlight seemed important, too. The house was very still. She had not been frightened all the night except once, when, in the midst of those pains, there had come an odd stillness. “ You don’t think I’ve been too long about it and killed him, do you ? ” she had asked, suddenly terrified. Mary had laughed. “ Not you,” she had said cheerily. “ I don’t suppose the little things like it any more than we do. He’ll be all right.”

Now she began to remember a little. Some one had once told her that the moment of parturition

was most nearly like the moment of death, and she remembered the stillness when the baby lay separate : that entire quiescence ; that loss of concern for everything about her. And then a great releasing of something, a flooding within her of a new nature, no longer concerned with what had mattered yesterday, full of to-morrow—brooding, urging, filling her. Like the wind in a sail which would buoy her up across a big future. It was *all* future, all possibility, all giving, all releasing, like that wide streaming sunlight. And now she remembered why. She turned her eyes feebly to the side of the bed. The baby was asleep in a lovely purity like a flower which had unclosed in the winning sunshine. She remembered biting the handkerchief in pieces lest she should make a groan, and wondering whether the night would ever come to an end. David had put the handkerchief in his pocket-book and said he would keep it. She hoped he wouldn't. It would be so silly to do that now or to remember anything at all of the night. There was such a little bit of the past after all and there was all the future, all the giving, all the finding out. She looked down again at the baby. How lovely ! She hoped she hadn't made too much fuss. How *could* she mind ? She and the little thing were left alone together. She was glad again they had all gone. *She* was the only person to understand this. The baby was hers. It seemed incredible that she shouldn't know how to cover and teach it. She had heard people talk

about "mother-love". It was mother-knowledge that was born in you with the child; a kind of illumination that came, that made you confident you could do it. She knew. She laughed at the thought that she shouldn't know. Such a confident little thing the baby was. It had never doubted when its tiny hands beat her breast and its groping mouth uttered its insistent cry that she would feed it. And the baby was right to be so sure. *She* was sure, too. David had watched the child fed and half joking, half seriously, had said :

"Mothers have all the luck ! Why doesn't he want *me* like that ? Why can't *I* do anything for him ? "

"Well I never ! Ain't she to have *nothing* ! " Mary had exclaimed.

Elizabeth smiled faintly as she remembered. How the future stretched out now with the baby. She herself only seemed to begin on the day the baby was born. The sunlight flooded the room and she was suddenly drowsy in the warm light. There was all the future, warm and healing. When Mary opened the door Elizabeth lay asleep. The baby was stirring and stretching in its cradle.

Chapter Sixteen

ELIZABETH WAS SITTING IN THE orchard with the baby. She was very happy. A warm moisture was in the air on which sweet fragrances seemed to arise from a hundred open vials. The elder tree in the lane was in full bloom and the multitude of bees seeking honey in its secret green alleys sent a deep humming into the garden like the tuning of a harp. The baby, its tiny face flushed, its fingers denting its mother's breast, would soon be asleep. Its warm and light breath was scarcely warmer and lighter than the soft air of the sunny orchard. The fingers of the rosy hand unclosed lightly. Elizabeth did not stir. The baby was asleep.

Helen watched them both. How complete the atmosphere wrapping them in together. She watched the extraordinary content in the sleeping baby. Such confidence was almost a force in itself, as was Elizabeth's brooding stillness. Serious and sweet she sat absorbed in the baby. It seemed as though she, too, in her quiescence and patience, had become part of that full and silent nature to which all living things came to be satisfied in their hunger. The spirit of gentleness seemed to breathe from her still young figure. It was the atmosphere the baby sought. How surely the little creature knew it was there and slept in security. Elizabeth,

looking in rapture at the purity and sweetness of her gift, seemed to have no conscious feeling of responsibility to it. Her part seemed to be to wait, to satisfy. It was as if one of her own flowers was in her care and she, attendant, was watching its silent needs and responding to them. She and the baby were going along the ways of life together, finding out what they needed as they went along. Elizabeth was no older than her baby in this. She was learning, as Mary had said, "by living on".

David went into the orchard to join them, pausing when he saw the sleeping baby. Elizabeth looked up and smiled. David bent and kissed her.

"I wish to goodness I could stop out here too," he said. "That beastly panel !"

Elizabeth smiled again. David went to the studio. She bent nearer to the baby, listening to its breathing.

## Chapter Seventeen

HERE HAD BEEN A GREAT BEATING of the gale upon the windows all night with a rush of rain now and then across the panes, and as Elizabeth opened the door she could see the storm moving sombrely across the sky. A whirl of scattering leaves filled the roadway. The trees, still full of foliage, swayed heavily and mournfully, but with a certain stateliness and with no tossing or wailing as in the bare winter wood. A full sound like the distant sea animated the landscape. Its colour had paled beneath the faint screen of rain which drooped from the laden clouds. The whole country seemed to have receded. Suddenly the weight of the storm was thrown upon the earth. The meadowland appeared to wrestle with the compelling sky. The fury of the wind leapt upon the heavy trees. The rain was tossed like shattered waves, white and blinding. Here and there a field showed a pale opening beyond the gloomy rampart of trees. The rain fell from the eaves and gutters perpetually, or was blown from them, falling on the flags with the noise of water thrown from a pail.

Then, without any warning, from the impenetrable sky, a wide ray of sunshine swept, unexplained, without apparent source. The storm seemed to be rolled into the distance. The wind

had a gentler sound as of a withdrawing wave and the trees seemed to sigh with relief. Fallen and sodden leaves covered the ground and the ditches were talking aloud. Greater variety of colour appeared in the wood. Flocks of birds were blown like leaves and the wet thatch of the hay-stack shone in the returning light. A vigorous and spacious day was coming with energy from the east. Broad waves of blinding light began to stream from the sun, advancing triumphantly across the gleaming landscape. So big the forces, so spacious and magnificent the surging brilliance, so uplifted the sky behind the wood, that the figure of John Dutton seated on the side of his pony-cart, the white pony coming slowly down the lane, seemed suddenly incongruous. All that background of splendid energy for the bent old man and his pony !

Elizabeth greeted him happily as he reined in the pony.

“ How’s Mary ? ” she asked.

John looked at her. He seemed sad she thought. He gazed at her from out of his dejection as if from a window.

“ Mary,” he said at last ; “ she’s bad. I’ve got a very rough house. Something’s wrong with her. Seems she can’t settle. Last night now, I come home and I was sitting at the fire opposite to her and all of a sudden she says ‘ Where’s John ? ’ she says. ‘ It’s high time he was back. Have you seen John ? ’ and there was me sitting opposite to her

all the time. I didn't know what to say to her. I feels very rough when she's like that. Don't hardly know where to put myself. Seems as though she ain't there either when she talks to me like that. 'Where's John?' she says, and me sitting there all the time and I didn't know what to say. I must push on, mam. I can't hardly leave her. I fetched a woman in to sit with her, but she can't stop. 'You must manage somehow,' she says, but how can I manage? I shall have to stop at home, I suppose. I fetched the doctor and he looks at her. I says to him : 'Doctor,' I says, 'perhaps if the weather was happy I could get her out a bit in the cart and let her enjoy herself a bit.' But he didn't say anything. Don't give me any comfort. I must push on, mam. I must get back to Mary."

The pony began to shuffle slowly on. John did not look back. Elizabeth began to push the baby's little carriage quickly away. The baby was asleep, its tiny face pure as a flower. It seemed as though she must take it away from the old man and his sorrow as quickly as possible. She was relieved when, on looking back, she could no longer see the top of his hat above the hedge. She turned back from her walk and, leaving the baby asleep outside, hurriedly entered the studio. David looked up from a drawing.

"Hullo, Elizabeth. I thought you'd gone out. I want some hands for my drawing. Just let me have yours, will you. You can sit down while I'm drawing. Put them on this book, crossed. Yes, that's it."



He took up his board and pencil. Elizabeth, doing as she was told without thinking, spoke her news directly out.

“ David dear, Mary Dutton’s ill—out of her mind or something. I met old John just now.”

“ Poor old Mary,” said David. “ Keep your hands still, Elizabeth.”

“ Yes—but Mary ! ” said Elizabeth.

“ Yes, I know,” answered David.

“ She nursed me and Johnkin,” said Elizabeth as if pleading for an understanding.

“ Well, I know that too,” said David. “ What of it ? ”

Elizabeth was silent. Now and then a distressed look crossed her face, but David was drawing her hands and did not see it.

## Chapter Eighteen

DAVID WAS HAMMERING AT A packing-case outside in the yard. His hair was being blown about by a mischievous little wind which was raising the shavings and whirling them about the yard. His back was towards the gate. An angry voice shouting suddenly near him made him raise his head and turn towards the sound. Old John Dutton was standing up in his cart in a state of great excitement and angrily shaking his fist at something or some one over the hedge. He shouted in short breathless jerks :

“Now then ! Are you giving me your attention ! Does you hear me shouting at you ! You won’t die with your boots off, young man. You six-pennorth of bad coppers you ! Abusing a dumb creature ! ”

At the farther side of the field a large boy and a dog were struggling together. As the sound of the angry voice startled the boy, the dog escaped and slunk to the hedge where he disappeared. The boy shouted some words which David did not catch. John shook his fist while the boy made off.

“Just you wait till I sees your master ! *I’ll* explain him your character ! Give it to him in full ! I sees you ! Watching you all the time I am. You needn’t think I won’t know you again ! I knows

you and I knows where you're going to. All about you I knows ! ”

John sat back in the cart again. David moved to the gate. The old man caught sight of him. He bent down and lifted a parcel which he offered to David over the side of the cart.

“ Abusing a dumb creature,” he explained. “ That’s what he was doing. I never could bear it and I never shall. I was talking the other day to young Stevens. Very nice young fellow. He started a round of travelling once, but, however, he didn’t settle to it. The other day he says to me—he was leaning up against the railway embankment—‘ Mr. Dutton,’ he says, ‘ I’ve had a misfortune.’ ‘ I’m sorry to hear it,’ I says. ‘ Yes,’ he says, ‘ and I’ll tell you how it happened. Two o’clock this afternoon it was, and I was going across the hay-field with my little dog and somehow or another he got into the cutter—running about all over the place he was—and it cutted his leg right off.’ ‘ You’ll have to kill him,’ I says. ‘ He won’t be no use again.’ ‘ Yes, I shall have to kill him,’ he says, ‘ but I’m attached to him,’ he says. A very nice feeling young fellow. I knows about it because I once had a little cat, a white one it was and it got choked in a rabbit wire. I couldn’t seem to settle. Mary she said to me, ‘ Ain’t you behaving a bit silly over that cat ? ’ ”

John was suddenly silent, his excitement spent.

“ How’s your wife ? ” asked David.

“ Bad,” answered John, taking his trouble back

to him again. "The doctor he don't say much. 'She'll have to go in the 'sylum,' he says. But I'd sooner see her in the churchyard than in the 'sylum. I can't understand how she does. Set herself on fire the other day. Burnt her two bodices. I don't know how she managed to put herself out. I've a very rough house, sir. Like a pair of scissors with the pin taken out. That's how I be, sir. I can't do nothin' without her."

"You've had her a long time, I expect, haven't you?" asked David.

"Forty-eight years! That's the time I've had her and never had no trouble with her until now." John settled back into the past. David stood listening sympathetically, his hands on the cart. The old man continued:

"When first I was courting Mary, seems she was with me all the time. Couldn't think of nothing else all day but when I should see Mary. Never was happy till I'd got her. I used to work up over the hill, building. I can remember the time I come to counting of the bricks and when I come to the last one I'd say—'That's Mary!' and down I'd come. Seems to hurt so bad till you know she's thinking the same as you do. Then when you knows you can go on till the next day." John paused, then went on again.

"Mary, she didn't like the public, so I didn't go there no more. I didn't seem to want to after I'd got Mary. All the time I was thinking of her. Couldn't get no rest till I'd seen her. By and by

I says plain to her, ' I can't go on like this, you know. You've got to come to me. I can't live no more like this. Seems as if you lives with me all the time, anyhow, you may's well come and do it.' She looks at me very kind for a minute or two. ' I'll come, Jack,' she says. Forty-eight years she've been there since and I've never had no trouble with her till now. I don't say she haven't scolded me. Didn't always let me do's I liked, but it didn't do me no harm, you know. I used to listen to her when she was doing of it. ' I daresay you're finding that a relief and it ain't doing me no harm as I can find out, so I'd better listen it out.' I don't mean to say she doed it often. Very practical temper she had. Never had no trouble with her before."

" Well, I hope she'll get better," said David, abruptly kind.

" I hopes so ! I hopes so ! " said John. " You know we wants some sun. That'll do her good. A red-hot day like this one. That's what we wants. You sees that field of corn—dead ripe it is, but understand, it hasn't been *sun*-ripened. It'll have to be carried. The ears is all falling into the ground and being lost. It ain't suffered so much from the rain. Oats and barley *they* have. The stalks is thinner ; gets beaten down sooner. Corn-stalks they holds up the heads better. I says if Mary can get out and enjoy herself she'll get well again. Good-morning, sir. I must push on."

" Poor old chap ! " meditated David. Then he suddenly called " Elizabeth ! "

She looked out from the upper window.

“What is it, David dear?”

“Nothing!” he said. “I just wondered where you were.”

In the evening the man who brought milk to the house brought also the news that Mary Dutton had died of a tumour on the brain.

## Chapter Nineteen

THE FARRIER HAD COME OUT TO have a word with the hedger who was coppicing the hedges in his lane.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Here's that old man out again! It's a long time since I've seen him. Seems as though the spirit's gone out of him," he added, watching the old man approach—John drove more slowly and looked more bent.

"It was bad for him, losing Mary!" said the hedger, raising himself and taking a sidelong glance.

"Forty-eight years they'd been married," observed the farrier mournfully.

"It's like a life-time," said the hedger. John came within earshot. "Morning, John," said the farrier heartily. "How d'ye feel!"

John looked at them as at strangers and then drew in the pony. "I thank you," he said slowly. "I feels rough. I misses Mary."

"It was a bad job losing Mary," said the farrier. The hedger began to trim the grass below the quickset hedge. He said nothing.

"There's something waiting for us all, I suppose," said John.

"I suppose so," assented the farrier, though not in the tone of a man who thought it likely.

"Seems as though it was to be," said the hedger

consolingly. "It's all in God's will, I suppose. Something for all of us."

"I misses her!" sighed John. "Misses her for clothes, for everything. Yesterday I caught a cold. Seems to have fell into my back. Can't hardly get out of the cart. I terrible needs Mary. Seems to want a wife now more'n I did when I was first married. Can't keep coming out on the road much longer. I'm going to give up and stop at home."

"Are you going to sell the pony?" asked the farrier with interest.

"No, I shan't sell him," said John with a wan smile. "I shall make a hole in the ground for him."

"You ain't going to have him killed, are you?" asked the farrier, while the hedger turned right away from his work and looked at the old man. John nodded.

"There's a lot of work in him yet," expostulated the farrier. "You should sell him and let somebody else have him."

"I'm afraid some of them gipsies'll get him," said John. "I couldn't bear it. He might get starved again like he was when I got him. I says to Mary, 'He'll work six months I daresay.' But now he's been working seven years for me. A good servant, but tisn't everybody could do with him. I couldn't bear for him to be abused again."

The men stared at the pony.

"He ain't starved now," said the hedger. "Like a barrel he is."

"I shan't part with him," said John. "Come on



now ! ” The pony began to walk on. The men stood staring after the cart. John did not turn round.

“ If that old man ain’t the queerest old fellow ! Seems funny being jealous like that over a pony, don’t it ? ” The farrier watched the end of the cart turn the lane.

“ He takes wonderful care of it,” said the hedger. “ See that net he’s got over him for the flies. Same as companions them two.”

“ Takes a lot more care of him than some people of their children,” said the farrier. “ It’ll be a funny job if he has him killed. I wished I’d ’ave asked him to take me along to the Seven Stars. I might have got a lift if I’d thought about it. However, I’m not really ready. I’d better get on, though, instead of talking here.”

His footsteps sounded like sharp hammer-taps on the clean dry road. He was soon out of sight. The hedger went on with his work. The ploughed land reached to the rise of the slope and the filbert slips glittered like silver rods. Rooks, their broad black wings beating down the distance of the sky, passed across the empty lands. Tiny, busy creatures stirred and rustled in the hedge. The young cattle grazed silently, walking here and there in search of succulent roots, their winter coats muddy and shining as they wandered across the green grass. From the whole country there rose the impulses of the springtime. The breaking of the slim rods went on regularly.

## Chapter Twenty

IT WAS LATE SPRING WITH THE noises of the fields and farms and the distant clatter of a train. Ploughing and harrowing was finished. There was the rolling of carts and trampling of horses in the lane ; coming and going and animation ; the sound of an accordion ; the crashing of a tree. Distinctness of form had left the trees, about which there clung a faint green mist. All the country was a little veiled, a little paler, and the surface of the ground was dry with a light dust travelling. Seeds were safely sown ; farm implements brought out from sheds ; carts and waggons standing on end to be painted ; shares taken to the blacksmith's ; tarpaulins brought indoors or spread in orchards for the women to mend ; potato-barrows opened ; greetings shouted across open fields ; sounds of sawing and hammering. Invigorating, busy, stirring, awaking ; the whole country seemed ringing with sound.

John Dutton, returning home at night, slipped the pony from between the shafts and unlatched the stable door. The pony walked to the stable, staying to pull up a tuft of grass wedged between the pump and the door-lintel. John followed and, taking off the collar, hung it on a hook in the wall. The pony walked to the manger. He

kicked and turned with bared teeth towards his master.

"Back, will you ! Back now ! I wasn't talking to you, I suppose, so you're going to tell me about it ! And how do you know I *feels* like talking ? I can't find no spirit like I once could. There ain't no fire in the house. There's lots of fussing little jobs to do besides looking after you. I shan't never find them things I've lost. Robbed terrible I've been. That's why I'm so poor as I be. Here's your tea now ! Not so quick about it. You can't eat it all at once. Who's going to get me *my* tea . It don't seem hardly worth while getting my own. By the time I've seen to you and gone in and lit the fire and got the kettle boiling I don't seem to fancy no tea."

The pony munched steadily. John threw a horse-cloth over him and searched under the thatch for the key of the house. He unlocked the door and went into the kitchen.

"I must light it, I suppose," he said, looking at the empty fire grate. "'Tisn't as if she'd gone out and would be back presently."

He lit the fire and set on the kettle, then sat back heavily in his chair. He watched the fire vacantly. It crackled and caught, then flared within the grate. He fell asleep in his chair. He did not hear a child's fist thumping on the door. Very soon the child, a boy, growing tired of knocking, opened the door cautiously and looked in. He saw John asleep and advanced confidently. If the old

man was asleep he couldn't grouse because he had come into the kitchen.

"Mr. Dutton," he said and giggled. Seeing that John did not stir he pushed one of the chairs with a squeak on the stone floor. John opened his eyes. The boy, before he could shut them again, spoke his message aloud.

"My mother says she can't come no more without you pays her more. She can't do it for the money, she says, and you ain't to expect her tomorrow."

"No," said John, not taking his eyes from the fire.

The boy suddenly became a little frightened and retreated to the door.

"Good-night," he said.

John was silent. The boy pulled the door to with a jerk and ran through the yard. He only felt quite safe when he was out in the lane. Then he began to whistle. The postman came in as he went out. He had been at the cottage by the copse and had looked out the letters.

"Only a halfpenny thing for that old man," he said. "Seems a pity to go up all that hill with it. It looks like a bill, too."

"He'll not be pleased to see you if you're taking him a bill," said the woman who lived at the house.

"It's got to go," said the postman. He had gone on. He pushed open the door and, catching sight of John sitting hunched up in his chair, had a

sudden glimpse of a great loneliness. He felt a wish to attempt sympathy.

"I expect you misses Mary a lot, John," he said, laying the letter behind him on the table.

John turned round. "I misses her terrible. Misses her for everything. Forty-eight years I been married and never had no trouble at all, and now them women, they wants money all the time. Mary, she didn't want nothing like that. I must have fell asleep, I suppose, when I come in just now. When you comes into a cold house and has to light the fire you don't seem to fancy no tea."

"There ain't much comfort without a woman," agreed the postman.

"When I remembers the things Mary used to do for them women," said John morosely. "There was a young man living up beside us. He comes to me and he says, 'John! my wife!' he says. 'You see how I'm situated. Do you think your Mary'd come up and attend to her?' he said. 'Well,' I said, 'I don't know whether she will or whether she won't, but I'll tell you what I'll do,' I said, 'I'll ask her.' 'I'll be obliged,' he says, and I asks Mary. She goes up and attends to her, but, however, the young woman died. Mary hurted herself very badly lifting of her in and out of bed. She was laid up herself for eight months, but she took the baby all that time. And you see this is how she looked at it. George, he come to me in confidence. 'John,' he said, 'what do you think

Mary's going to charge me for keeping the baby? I can't do no better,' he says, 'than what I can, but what I can I'll do.' 'Well,' I says to him, 'you can't do no more than what you can, that's certain. But, however, I'll ask Mary.' So one night I speaks to Mary about it. 'Mary,' I says, 'what are you going to charge George for the baby?' '*Charge George?*' she says. '*Charge him?* Nothing!' she says. 'Ain't he got trouble enough?' That's how she looked upon it, you see. But now they comes—any amount of money—and does as little as they likes."

## Chapter Twenty-one

DAVID WAS CARVING PUPPETS FOR a theatre for Johnkin when he should be old enough to watch it. Elizabeth and Helen were looking on. Johnkin was asleep in his cradle outside the door in the sunshine. From the coolness in the studio Elizabeth could see the cradle and the side of the baby's cheek. Helen was watching David's knife with the delight of a child. He was carving the head of a leprechaun for a tiny forest scene.

"David, it's perfectly wonderful. I can hardly believe the little thing isn't alive. But it's more suitable for a museum. It's far too good for a child."

"How can anything be 'too good' for anything?" said David with cheerful contempt. "Nothing *can* be 'too good'. That's art."

"Yes ; but couldn't you do it just well enough. I'm sure little man Johnkin would be just as pleased and you wouldn't have wasted such a lot of time," said Helen.

"David couldn't do anything 'well enough'," interposed Elizabeth.

"Besides, there is no 'well enough'," said David. "If a thing's well enough done it can obviously be better and you've got to go on. What do you mean by wasting time, Helen? What's time for?"

"To be used, isn't it?" said Helen teasingly.

"You're the sort of person who does one thing and then does another," said David, snorting. "And then you think you've 'used' your time."

"And you?" asked Helen sedately.

"Well. I begin a piece of work and I go on till I can't do it any better and then it's finished," said David.

"Making no difference between what's important and what isn't important?" asked Helen.

"There *isn't* any difference—in the work—in that's what you mean," replied David. "Elizabeth, have you got a piece of green silk—any bit will do. There he is, the little chap!" He dangled the puppet over the table.

"Delicious!" exclaimed Helen.

"Oh, David, how pretty!" said Elizabeth.

"Won't Johnkin love it!"

"Let's wake him up and see," suggested David.

"David, how can you! No, you really *mustn't*!" said Elizabeth, as David looked out at the cradle and back at the puppet.

"How large are you going to make the theatre?" asked Helen.

"Oh, about three feet of a proscenium," said David. "Elizabeth's going to do the trimmings."

"It will be the loveliest thing," said Elizabeth with animation. "The first scene will be in the moonlight, all green and still with one white owl hooting. And then we are going to change the light to the side of the stage and the colour will



slowly change, too. And David and I are going to whistle, for the birds singing in the sunrise. And then there'll be the little forest creatures one by one coming out to play."

"And the march of the hours," said David.

"That will be in the evening dusk. We shall change the light again," said Elizabeth, "and I'm going to dress them in different shades of peacock colours with gold eyes so that they come and go in the blue evening atmosphere."

"How lovely! And all for Johnkin!" said Helen, looking kindly at the happiness in the faces of the young father and mother.

"There you are again," said David. "What does it matter who or what it's for? It's a work of art. That's what matters."

Elizabeth suddenly started to her feet. The happy look gave way to one of annoyance. She reddened and said angrily:

"David, there's that old man coming here—with a parcel, I suppose. I wish you wouldn't let him come so often."

"Why ever not?" asked David.

Helen looked quietly at Elizabeth. There was more than annoyance shaking her. It seemed more like fear and yet—how could it be?

"He's always coming," said Elizabeth, "and Johnkin out there, too."

She left the studio and, hurrying to the cradle, picked it up as it was and staggered with it to the cottage. David looked after her.

“What in the name of—— Bring it in, John. Thank you.”

John laid the parcel, a small one, on the table, and remained, resting his hand upon it. He looked at them in silence, reproachfully and mournfully. Then with a kind of acceptance of this as of everything else that was to come to him now, he said :

“She don’t like me no more now Mary’s gone. Mary, she was a help to her, and does she think she wasn’t no help to me? Mary, she’ve suffered and gone and I ain’t got her no more. Everybody they gives you the go-by when you’re in sorrow. I wish you good-bye, sir.” He turned and went from the table and out at the door.

“I’m afraid he heard,” said Helen.

## Chapter Twenty-two

WELL, IT'S TOO BAD OF ELIZABETH. She's getting selfish. *I* can't leave *my* work. See if *you* can't say something to the old chap. Pathetic old fellow he looks, doesn't he? " David pulled his stool to the bench.

Helen followed John. He did not turn round when she called his name, though she knew he had heard it. " He's offended," she thought. " I'll go to his house in the evening."

A wide shining evening brought her a great sense of space and freedom as she stood outside the old man's cottage. The garden wanted weeding and the front door, which had always stood open in fine weather, was shut. She saw John in the orchard and went to the gate. He looked at her in a watchful silence. She spoke with the frankness and sympathy which seemed the only way of breaking into his suspicion.

" There was hardly time for me to tell you this morning, John, of the difference which Mary's going makes to us all. It's hard to have wounded places touched, I know, and in the end there is so little I can say which can heal *that*, but it helps to know of the warmth and comfort which Mary set everywhere she went and how we all sympathize with you in your loneliness now."

" I thank you, mam," said John slowly. " I'm in

trouble. I badly misses Mary. I don't know how 'tis I misses her more as time goes on. I thought I should miss her when I put her in the ground, and yet *they* can't feel the cold and the dark. It can't make no difference to them. But I misses her about the house and everywhere. Now, for instance, the other night I was sitting in my chair stirring up the fire with a little poker what Mary used to rake out the ashes with in the mornings, and the handle come right off ; fell in the fender, understand. 'Mary,' I says, 'the handle's come off your little poker.' And there weren't no Mary to answer me back. I can't tell you how I felt it. I shook and I cried. Always was there was Mary. Never went out much to other people's houses. I'm always expecting of her and she ain't there no more. Once, now, I thought I saw her. How glad I was ! She was coming in from the orchard with her arms full of clean clothes. She was standing there like she always did do. 'Oh, Mary,' I said, 'if 'twas only you back again how happy I'd be.' But *she* wasn't there—only sunshine. Sometimes I can't hardly bear it, I aches so. Mary now, she was very good at bearing trouble. She feeled it very bad when our little grand-daughter died. We had her in the country a lot ; but, however, she died. I says to her once, 'Do you think,' I says to her, 'that little babies grows up in heaven? Shall I know Poppet again or will she keep on growing?' 'It ain't nothing to do with *us* what she does,' says Mary. 'She don't belong to us no

more. Stands to reason the Good Shepherd won't hurt His lamb, will He? You can't do better than leave it to Him. He won't hurt Poppet !' I suppose He won't hurt Mary neither, but I misses her. There was a little thing now. You wouldn't think it would matter like that, but there was a scarecrow I made now. Terrible bothered with starlings we was one spring. I put in two rows of shallots. ' Don't put in no seed yet,' said Mary—(understand, we'd had a lot of rain : 'twas like digging in a bed of mortar in the garden)—' they won't lie comfortable in the ground.' But, however, the starlings they picked at 'em terrible bad. So I sees I was going to be troubled with 'em when I puts in the peas, and I makes a scarecrow, and Mary she come out in the garden and laughed at him. Called him the Black Prince she did. ' Well,' she said, ' handsome is that handsome does. I don't call him a beauty.' Many a laugh we had out of the Black Prince. ' He's keeped the starlings away now, hasn't he?' I says. ' Oh yes,' says Mary. ' I'm not denying his use. It's his looks I've fell out with.' Now yesterday I was in the shed looking for a piece of rope. I pulled out a bit and then I pulled down the Black Prince. I couldn't help it. I cried. ' Mary,' I says, ' I misses you. Everything I does I seems to remember you more.' Forty-eight years and then to go like this. There ain't nothing I touches but what she's had to do with. I don't say I've always been what I ought to be, but Mary she was always the same.

That's how it is I misses her. Seems as though she's done something she never did before and I can't get used to it."

He was silent for a moment then went on :

" Mary, she used to say, ' You must live with trouble to find out what it's meant for. Things come to you,' she says. But I ain't found out no meaning in this. I thank you, mam ! You means very kindly by me. I thank you."

Helen left him and, returning to the studio, told of her visit to David. From the open bedroom window they could hear Elizabeth singing to baby Johnkin who was wakeful in the heat.

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## Chapter Twenty-three

AS DAVID CAME IN FROM THE village one morning of the following week, he saw Elizabeth sitting on the grass in the hayfield. She had climbed the stile, almost closed now by the growth of the roses in the garden hedge, and was sitting there motionless and idle. He laid down the hammer he had been to buy and, pushing aside the trail of roses, leapt the stile. Elizabeth turned her head and saw him, but did not smile. She watched his approach as though it did not concern her. David was irritated. Why wasn't Elizabeth more pleased to see him? After all, he'd left his work. She might have thought of that. She *was* pretty, though. He'd never seen any one like her. And then he saw that she was sitting much as she had sat in the hayfield the first time he had seen her. He wondered whether, knowing her better, he would have married her if he saw her now for the first time. Elizabeth smiled, a rather drooping little smile.

"David dear," she said, looking up at him.

How pretty she was with her soft sunlit hair and the pure outline of her face. Of course he would have married her. But what sort of maggots had she been getting into her head? He stood looking down at her a moment, then sat on the grass beside her. She did not turn towards him but sat silent,

looking at the showers of wild roses in the hedge. If she had not looked so pretty David would have been irritated. Why should she treat him like that? Why didn't she talk to him?

"What's the matter with you nowadays, Elizabeth?" he asked sharply.

Elizabeth turned her head and looked at him. "You never seem to understand," she said simply.

"Well, tell me and let me understand, then," demanded David.

"I don't know how," said Elizabeth.

"You're always thinking about something. It's nothing to do with me—always something else. What is it?" he asked.

"I can't explain," said Elizabeth slowly. "I wish living wasn't so lonely."

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed David. "You've no business to talk like that, Elizabeth, when you're married to me and you've got Johnkin."

"That's why it's so lonely," replied Elizabeth. "There doesn't seem anything big enough to make it worth while. I seem to have been left. I know. There was your coming and all that time." She broke off and put her hand into David's. "I *do* love you, David dear," she said; "and then you and everything—our love and all that time after seemed to have just happened for Johnkin. I don't mean that I loved you less, but having Johnkin seemed so much bigger a thing. And then suddenly Mary was hurt and died, and I want something bigger and safer than we are for Johnkin;



just to know that it's been worth while. I seem to have been travelling on into one wide place after another, and when I get there there's nothing worth while at the end."

"It's selfish," pronounced David

"I know," said Elizabeth. "You think so because it hasn't hurt you. I can't explain.

"It's all come to an end—all that I had, I mean," she went on while David sat nonplussed, but looking at her attentively. "And why should I have come so far and then been left without anything to go on to. It'll happen to Johnkin like that, too. That's what I mind most. He'll come to this as I have and he'll ask me why and I shan't be able to tell him. You see *I'm* quite young and it's come to an end so soon and if I don't find out, who's to tell Johnkin?"

"I don't like my wife to be unhappy," said David. "What can I do, Elizabeth? You know I'll do anything I can."

"Dear David," said Elizabeth with a tiny gay smile which went as soon as it had come.

David smiled hopefully. That was more like Elizabeth.

"I know," she went on, "that I'm happy in so many ways. I know how happy Johnkin makes me; and I know when you came over the field that day I thought I'd never known before what happiness was, though I'd been happy in a way, too. But it was a kind of still glory that came into the field with you, and you stopped beside me and

I knew you'd never go away again. And then, too, there's the country and the beauty you can't help making in your work however cross you are, David dear. And then suddenly there's an end somewhere."

David put his arm round his wife. "You're all right, Elizabeth," he said cheerfully. "You're run down a little. There's nothing really wrong. Don't let's make a tragic affair out of nothing. Come along back to the studio. You might sit to me for the drapery of that thing I began from Helen."

His mind began to work now. He'd send word to Helen. She professed to understand Elizabeth and she'd perhaps knock a little sense into her. It was a pity women were so pretty sometimes that you couldn't do without them. Otherwise you could cut them out. He looked at his wife again. No ! After all, he wouldn't have cared to cut out Elizabeth.

## Chapter Twenty-four

DAVID HAD HIS OWN IDEA OF Elizabeth and he didn't want it altered. Gentle, serious and helpful as she was, passion wasn't in the picture. But it was in Elizabeth, Helen knew.

"What's the matter with Elizabeth?" David asked her suddenly.

"I think she's come up against death," said Helen simply.

"What in the world do you mean?" demanded David. "Elizabeth knows perfectly well she's got to die, doesn't she?"

"Perhaps she's just found it out—or rather—perhaps she's just found out that Johnkin must," replied Helen.

"There's nothing wrong with Johnkin, is there?" said David in sudden fear. "Elizabeth isn't hiding things, is she?"

"No, no! I'm sure she isn't. Johnkin's a prize baby," said Helen confidently.

"I wish to goodness you'd talk to her, then, if you know what's the matter," said David.

"Why don't *you*?" asked Helen. "Don't *you* ever think about death?"

"If I was always thinking about my latter end I should never get any work done," replied David.

“ It’s the thinking-point of humanity, all the same,” said Helen.

“ Well, what’s that to do with this case ? ” David sheered off : “ An old woman dies. She was a decent enough old woman, but she *was* an old woman. She’d nothing much to do with Elizabeth, and then Elizabeth can’t settle down. It might be *me* that was dead.”

“ It would be quite as bad for Elizabeth, I agree,” Helen smiled.

“ Well, then, what’s the matter ? ” said David.

Helen saw his genuine appeal for help. She spoke sympathetically. He looked no more than a boy. Thinking as she spoke, she went on. David listened anxiously.

“ There’s one point at which Elizabeth and old John Dutton stand together. You hear the old man repeat again and again through his grief a kind of astonishing thing, that Mary never did nothing before that he hadn’t expected. That fact alone has destroyed his ideas of the world he lived in.”

“ Oh ! I can see that it makes all the difference to the old chap ; but Elizabeth—it’s morbid, it’s selfish. It’s her duty to think of me and Johnkin,” interrupted David. “ She’s all right, of course, in a way. She’s lovely, but she doesn’t think of me as she used to do.”

“ Poor David ! ” laughed Helen. “ Does she think of Johnkin ? ”

“ Never lets him out of her sight. Mother-love, I suppose,” said David grumpily.

“ Johnkin’s proper atmosphere ! ” replied Helen. “ That’s why he’s such a duck.” David was silent. Helen continued : “ I once told you that Elizabeth had passion. You laughed. It seemed an absurd word for Elizabeth. Serious, sweet little Elizabeth to have passion. It wasn’t your idea of her at all, but it’s Elizabeth, for all that. You’ve come to the point I told you of—the living and growing of things, and Elizabeth especially. You’ll never be able to stop her growing, but you can hurt her infernally while she’s doing it.”

“ These blessed theories of yours ! ” interjected David.

“ David dear, I love Elizabeth,” said Helen seriously, “ and I’ve felt a little responsible for her since she married ; and now I think I see where she is. Don’t you see how she went into life so gaily and courageously, laughing at the experiences which made other women quail. All her nature set to give and shelter life. Think of her, scarcely mature, thinking her wonderful hopes about living, watching your creating work, watching her flowers, full of her gift of life, and then become a vehicle of life herself, and when she comes to her biggest experience of it and misses none of the pain which is its condition, laughing at it. ‘ Dear little Johnkin was worth it,’ she said to me. ‘ Why *should* I have minded ? ’ And then there was lovely little Johnkin living and wanting life and Elizabeth hovering over him always to give it him, adorably tender and maternal. Both baby and mother were opening

towards life, loving and contented, like Elizabeth's lilies in the sunshine. And suddenly death is here like a cold wind. I told you passion was sleeping in Elizabeth. It's broken round her child. She would shelter it. She's looking about everywhere for some defence for it. She's given life to Johnkin and she feels now powerless, paralysed, weakened. She can't stand between Johnkin and this."

"What's Elizabeth feeling all these things for? She never tells *me*," said David.

"She hasn't told me either," said Helen.

"Oh, well, perhaps you're wrong," said David.

"David dear, one day, a short time before Johnkin was born, I came upon Elizabeth in the garden. She was standing before a tall virgin lily. It was quite early and the dew was still cool in the shadow. To me who opened my eyes upon it all straight from the town it seemed unthinkably pure and still. It was very lovely, too, in the garden. I don't wonder Elizabeth walked there with her unborn baby. She—or perhaps I should say they, for Elizabeth was thinking as 'they', I know—were standing motionless before the lily, and as I came over the grass Elizabeth smiled happily and said quite seriously and simply, 'I'm waiting to see this lily open. I want to be the first to see what even God has never seen. It will be wonderful : just like my baby.' It *was* wonderful, David dear. She and the lily both with their gift of life. I think I never saw such deep and radiant joy in any one's face as there was in

Elizabeth's while she watched the lily. Johnkin ought to be a poet."

"I wonder if he will," said David.

"She seemed to have some point of actual understanding with the flower, quite other than mine. It was as if she was waiting to share its joy and she knew what the joy was. She had a beautiful time while Johnkin was growing, but now and then she wanted some settled thing in the middle of all the changing and she found it in Mary—experienced, sensible, kind Mary. It's there that she and old John are bewildered together. The safety and settledness of things are gone for both of them. They're neither of them so secure of things as they were, and with Elizabeth it's deeper than with John. She doesn't 'miss Mary' like John does. It's more than that."

"It's morbid," said David. "Elizabeth ought to be thinking of her duty."

"Perhaps she is," said Helen. "I see in a sense what she is asking from life at this point. She needs a guarantee that it won't let Johnkin down."

"What about me?" demanded David.

"You haven't wanted passion from Elizabeth," Helen went on. "No artist wants it if he can help. You're right for yourself, of course. It makes too big a claim upon you. You want protection from it in safer things, daily affection, shelter, sympathy. That's why you married."

"I'm very fond of Elizabeth: that's why I

married," said David. "Elizabeth's run down and needs a change. I shall take her away."

"You'll not take her away from Elizabeth," warned Helen.

In the cottage sitting-room as she passed through she caught sight of Elizabeth. She watched her from the door. Her slight arms could hardly enfold Johnkin now, and her girlish figure leaned forward over his weight as she rose to lay him in his cot. She stood for a moment looking at the rosy face, and Helen saw the cheek thinner now after the fatigue of nursing. There were tears in her eyes as she sat down and was silent. It seemed to Helen that the more triumphantly Johnkin took hold of life the more Elizabeth feared. Johnkin's very beauty was a hard thing now. A cold barrier seemed to have checked all the impulses of living which had carried Elizabeth on to this consummation. Helen felt great pity. She put her arms round the seated little figure.

"Don't cry, Elizabeth dear," she said gently.

"Was I crying?" said Elizabeth, bursting into tears.



## *Chapter Twenty-five*

**E**LIZABETH HAD FALLEN ASLEEP IN a long chair in the orchard. Opening her eyes quietly, she saw old John Dutton standing looking at her. Scarcely awake, she did not turn her eyes away. She was not sure that she wasn't dreaming. She had never seen the old man in the orchard before. With a start she looked round for Johnkin, then remembered that Helen had taken him away. John looked at her mournfully.

"You don't like me no more now Mary's gone," he said.

"Oh, please," Elizabeth stammered. "It isn't that, John. I don't know how to explain." He looked at her with a morose understanding.

"I'm in trouble. How would you like it if you was in trouble and other people give you the go-by. Mary, she've suffered and gone. She was a help to you, and does you think she wasn't no help to me? I misses her terrible. Once they says to me, 'You must always touch a dead body if you sees one, otherways you won't get rid of the feeling that they're alive.' But I touched Mary. I kissed her face. I misses her more, I think, because she never answered me back when I kissed her good-bye. But, however, that isn't what I've come for. Mary, she used to talk about our Saviour. What I under-

stands of it I believes in. I picks my way among it a little and I judges from things I sees. But I believes in Mary, though she've gone. When I sees you pick up the baby and run as though I was going to hurt it, I said to myself: 'Very well,' I said, 'I won't come no more where I'm not wanted. I ain't dependent upon them. I can manage alone.' "

" I *am* so sorry, John. I didn't know that you saw me," lamented Elizabeth. " I wouldn't have done it if I'd thought you were so near."

" No, I don't suppose so," said John ; " but listen and you'll see it was a good thing I seed you. And this is how I think it was. Because it put me in mind of Mary saying something about you. You didn't know we was watching of you, but that was the case. I remembers the occasion very well. Mary, she was telling me that Polly Allgood was putting you in a room looking out on the graveyard. ' 'Tain't suitable,' says Mary. ' You mustn't be having too much graveyard to your breakfast.' That's what I remembers of Mary saying, and I remembers the occasion. And when I went away, I couldn't help thinking about it. I says to myself, ' Young Mrs. Niven,' I says, ' she reminds me of a pony I once had. When first I had him, he was a wonderful shier. Wouldn't pass a puddle of water.' I don't know why, nor I don't know what he was thinking. But that was the case. So I sees how I must do. Understand, every puddle of water I comes to in the road I stops him

and I goes up to his head and takes hold of him and brings him up to it—talking to him so's he knows I'm sympathizing with him—and there I holds him till he stops backing away from it. And I cured him, understand. Never shies at a puddle now. He knows it ain't going to hurt him because I've showed it to him. And that's how I thinks about you. I says, 'She thinks I'm going to hurt the baby.' ”

“I don't think I really thought so, John. Oh, poor John, I *am* so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.”

“You didn't hurt me—not to last, you didn't,” replied John, “but I says, ‘She've got to get accustomed to it, same as that pony I was telling you of.’” John thrust his hand into the pocket of his coat and brought out something wrapped in his red spotted handkerchief. He unrolled it carefully and held out to Elizabeth a dead whitethroat. He watched her with grave simplicity. She looked at him quietly, the tiny body on her palm. She stroked the soft feathers. John went on. “You ain't frightened of that, because 'tis so little. But it's dead, you know. You feels it? All stiff? It won't build no more nests, nor it won't sing no more. I don't know as I can tell you why ever it was alive, just to die. Didn't hardly seem worth while. But it *was* alive and it's dead. That's all I can tell you about it. That's all I *knows*, understand. But I can *think* more if I wants to, and this is how I thinks about it.” He stopped for a moment, breathing roughly.

“ Please do sit down in this chair,” said Elizabeth. Such a mournful and lonely old figure he looked, living all the time away somewhere and visiting her for the moment out of the remote solitudes of his spirit. He had scarcely noticed her suggestion, so bent was he on getting his thoughts clearly out, but brushed it aside as an irrelevant interruption.

“ I thank you, mam ! I stands more’n I sits,” he said. “ Now I remembers one time. I can’t say as I remembers exactly the year it was, but I remembers the occasion very well. We had a terrible hard frost—froze the pump, froze the eggs in the hen-pen, froze everything ! It was a terrible hard winter. I didn’t go out, understand, no more’n I was obliged to, but now and again I *had* to. All shut in the sky was. Very funny to look at. A big rosemary bush died in the garden and I’ve never knowed that to happen before. But, however, I used to go out, and one day I can’t tell you the number of dead birds I passes on the road. Pitiful ! All froze up and lying about the road. Thrushes and blackbirds and robins. There wasn’t no goldfinches because they goes away in the winter, but magpies there was. All sorts lying about the roads, dead, and when I gets home I tells Mary. ‘ It’s pitiful,’ I says, ‘ to see them.’ And Mary she says, ‘ The sparrows they don’t fall on the ground without our Father,’ and I says, ‘ Well, if He’s counting of ’em up this morning He’ll be busy.’ Mary she laughed, but she didn’t like no making fun. I was pondering, understand, about

it all the time. 'Those little birds,' I says to Mary, 'they've all taken a terrible trouble to make themselves comfortable. Working from morning till night they've been and nothing to get out of it in the end. It don't seem worth while,' I says. And Mary she pondered a little and then she says, 'I suppose it's like this. Living, we understands a little of, and dying we don't. But I suppose we *shall* do. You takes the thing you understands and you lives by that and by and by you understands a little more. But living and dying He's big enough to hold us both, John.' I remember of Mary saying that and I remember of her saying something else. She says one day, 'If trouble comes, you *must* take it into your heart. Otherwise it'll torment you. Trouble,' she says, 'it's sent to soften your heart to other people.' Well, I'm in trouble now. I can't hardly talk about Mary without crying. I aches sometimes. I can't hardly bear it. But I remembers of Mary being upsetted because Polly Allgood had put you looking out on the graveyard and I says, 'Young Mrs. Niven,' I says, 'she's a wonderful shier same as that pony I once had. I'll go and talk to her kind.' I thank you, mam. I'll take the little dead bird, mam, and I'll give it to the cat. I wish you good-day, mam."

Elizabeth sat on and on. The shadow of the walnut tree fell over her and she shivered a little. She sat still as if she were listening intently. Through the old man's stumbling talk some other thing had been speaking—something bigger—not

words, but some other language. She felt that if she stayed very still she might catch it—hear the actual sound of the impulse of which he was the vehicle.

“What’s that old man been talking about all this time?” asked David beside her all at once. Elizabeth turned a joyful face.

“I don’t know, David. He said all sorts of things. I’ve learnt a good deal just now,” she said.

“I shouldn’t think *he* could tell you much,” said David.

“No, it wasn’t his ideas, it was himself that I thought of first. But he came to try and help me though he couldn’t find his way through his own trouble. And then all at once there wasn’t old John there at all but a sort of way through him, through his mind to something else, something bigger, something beautifully big, something loving and sharing itself. There *is* something bigger behind living, David dear. I’ve seen it through old John. Something that made him come and try to tell me his funny ideas. I’ve seen it once and I’m going to find it. It’s in the trees and the flowers and the living creatures like the birds, too, but it’s more in old John’s wanting to help. And it was coming through his own trouble, too; a sort of breaking up of himself to share it with me. I can’t explain how it came. It was only a moment that it came quite near, but I have it safe even if I can’t find the words. And it wasn’t words—it was a kind of knowledge of life. Old John’s ideas didn’t

seem to matter. Mary was always cleverer than he was. Old John didn't know nearly so much, but it was a sort of faithfulness to the things he *did* know that made him come to me. And I'd hurt him, too, and he hadn't got Mary to talk it over with. Oh ! poor old John ! I heard it speaking through him, some bigger thing than I've ever known before. I shan't rest now till I find it and know what it is."

"All right, Elizabeth. You go ahead with your big thing," said David cheerfully. "I don't care so long as you don't stop loving me." He looked at her musingly.

"Sit still as you are now," he said. "Don't move ! I like the way your dress falls. I'll finish the drawing for that drapery I began from Helen. She doesn't sit half as well as you do."

## Chapter Twenty-six

IN THE WITHDRAWING LIGHT OF an autumn sunshine, when the shadows are thrust to great length upon the stubble fields, a new tenderness is added to the caress of the sunlight upon the earth, the lingering of one about to say farewell. The stored harvest brings a sense of finality ; the ebbing light of unstaying departure. Evening and morning already give one a glimpse of winter. There is a pause in nature, a reflective mood seems to pass in review the spent seasons. Only very imperceptibly does the year turn to its decline.

Helen Ross, come down for the last time that summer to visit her young friends, lingered by the bare hayfield, now a vivid emerald with its new grass, where she had listened with David to the soft burden of summer music. Across the short cut the figure of a man was advancing to the stile. Helen had never seen old John Dutton walking before, but it was he.

" You haven't the pony to-night," she said as he climbed over the stile.

" No, mam ! I've done away with him," said John. " ' I'll see the summer through,' I said, ' and then I shall make a hole in the ground for him.' "

" Couldn't you have got a good master for him ? " asked Helen.



“No, mam,” he replied. “I might have sold him, I’ll allow, but then some of these gipsies might have got hold of ’en and starved and beat him. I couldn’t bear for any one else to have him. He’s been a good servant to me for many a year. Capital good worker he’s been. Didn’t never refuse nothing I gived him. Starved he was and overdrove when I had him. I says to Mary when I brings him home : ‘ Well, if he ain’t a better man at the end of three months, he’ll have lasted out my time.’ But I’ve had him seven years. Wonderful spiteful he was. ’Tain’t every one could have done with him. But a good servant.” He paused and going back into his memory he looked again at Helen. “There’s some ladies what you can talk to and there’s some you can’t,” he observed. “You know, mam, one night, not so very long after Mary died, I had the beautifulest dream any one could have in this world. I dreamt I was in Sulicot copse. I don’t know how I got there, nor I don’t know what I’d a gone there for, but I *was* there, and when I was there, there comes in a little white dog into the wood, and he terrible hunted in that wood—terrible hunted he did—and he didn’t find *anything*. I *knowed* the dog, mind. I don’t know as I ever *stroked* it, but I *knowed* who it belonged to all right, but he didn’t find what he was hunting for. And by and by I was outside the wood. I don’t remember touching of the fence, but I was over it and it seemed all broken down and the little dog he blundered up

against me and I looked at him and he was looking up in the sky over in the west. And naturally *I* looked too, and there was the most beautiful cloud coming over from the west, from over the hill there where young Mrs. Niven and her baby lives, and it floated away. It was all sorts of beautiful colours—not only one colour, but every colour you could think of, and it floated away. And very soon the little dog blundered up against me again, and I looked and he was looking up into the west again and there was a second cloud bigger than the first one and all the same beautiful colours, and there in the middle of it was our Saviour all in white with His crook, like you see Him in the pictures of the Good Shepherd, and He floated along with the cloud till it came over the churchyard, and when it got there it hung for a little and then it went off pop like a gun. And when I woke up—I *knowed* I was dreaming, you know : I *knowed* it wasn't real : I was terrible troubled about that little white dog. I knowed what the other part of the dream meant all right—I knowed that was sent to comfort me—but suddenly I thought what the little dog meant. He was hunting for something he couldn't find, wasn't he, mam ? And so am *I* hunting for something I can't find. I misses a lot of things. Of course I haven't looked everywheres I knows, but I've hunted and hunted. There was a little gold key. When Mary was in service, her missis lost a little gold key. She couldn't find it anywheres, and one day my wife was

sweeping under the chest of drawers in her bedroom and she swept out this little gold key and took it to her missis. 'I found this, mam,' she said, 'when I swepted out under the chest of drawers in your bedroom.' 'Well, Mary,' she says, 'you may keep it for your honesty,' and that's why we terrible prized that little gold key. Well, it's gone, mam. And there was a gold guard and locket that I gave Mary when I was courting of her. That's gone, too. And that's why that little white dog come into my dream. He was sent to tell me I should never find 'em again. I knows that all right and I knows where they went to. I knows who that little white dog belongs to."

"You may find the things," said Helen.

"No!" said John a little displeased and resuming his journey. "I shan't never find them. I've got too much faith in my little white dog."

Helen saw him cross the stile on the farther side of the road and pass, a solitary old man, across the field. Vision and prejudice and powers of love and sorrow held him. "Hadn't had nobody to tell him things—only Mary," and Mary was gone. Old John with his prejudices would follow soon. Such knowledge as he had he had followed, "picking his way" through it. A passing figure through the harvested fields. In those who would take his place new qualities were emerging and old virtues were already dis-

credited. Helen turned homeward. As she went she saw coming towards her Elizabeth and baby Johnkin, who recognized her, waving a vigorous hand.

THE END

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